

Solus Christus

Old Testament and New Testament

Gen 28:12-15 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!

¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.

¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.""

John 1:51 And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Luke 24:25-27 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

John 5:39-40 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,
⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

1Co 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men...

³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

2:1 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

CLIMBING JACOB'S LADDER?

ALL HUMAN RELIGION, INCLUDING Christianity in its corrupt forms can be summed up with one idea: **Ladder Climbing**. The metaphor is that there **is a ladder between earth and heaven** (whatever “heaven” happens to mean to the individual, be it the place where God is, or simply someone trying to find ultimate meaning in their life, and therefore even the atheist can be climbing these ladders). You start on the ground, and begin your climb by placing your foot onto that first easy step. Then, slowly and carefully, holding firmly to the sides, rung by rung, ever higher you rise as you ascend to “heaven” or the “divine.”

Writing about Martin Luther's theology, **Adolf Koeberle** identified three kinds of ladder-climbing **in the Roman Church**: **Moralism**, **speculation**, and **mysticism**.¹ These same ladders are around today. **Gene Veith** summarizes them, “**Moralism, in which the will seeks to achieve perfection of conduct; speculation, in which the mind seeks to achieve perfection of understanding; and**

¹ **Adolf Koeberle**, *The Quest for Holiness*, trans. John C. Mattes (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936; rpt. Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1995), 2.

mysticism, in which the soul seeks to achieve perfection by becoming one with God” (underline mine).² So with the will, the mind, and the emotions, man has figured out a way to involve every part of his being in this ascent to the stars.

These ladders are everywhere, not only in religion, but with non-religious people, all of whom are seeking transcendent meaning apart from themselves. Yet, ironically, to reach the top *you climb the ladder*. In other words, it isn't really about the transcendent, because you can get there all by yourself. So how does that transcend? These ladders are ultimate about the unholy trinity of fallen humanity: “my, myself, and I,” which is why we needed to look at *sola gratia* (grace alone) in a previous sermon. Grace alone is the opposite of all ladder climbing.

But I want us to understand these a little better for our topic today—*solus Christus* (Christ alone). To that end, I discovered three popular songs during the past 40 years each called “Jacob’s Ladder.” Amazingly, each song hits in its own unique way on one of the three ideas.

² Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *The Spirituality of the Cross: The Way of the First Evangelicals* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 17.

Moralism

The ladder of moralism is sung by Huey Lewis and the News as he considers some smooth talking, hypocritical T.V. preacher he was watching late one night:

Coming over the airwaves
The man says I'm overdue
Sing along, send some money
Join the chosen few
Well, Mister I'm not in a hurry
And I don't want to be like you
All I want from tomorrow
Is to get it better than today
Step by step ... Higher and Higher... Rung by rung
Climbing Jacob's Ladder³

To my knowledge, Huey is not a Christian. But you can see how he still has in his head this idea that if I'm just good enough, that's all that matters. Just be a little better today than yesterday. As he puts it in the previous verse, I don't need no "fat man selling salvation in his hand ... trying to

³ Huey Lewis and the News, "Jacob's Ladder," *Fore!*, Chrysalis, 1986.

save me. I'm doing alright, the best that I can." (Truly, God has put the requirements of the law on everyone's heart.)

Previously we saw this moralistic ladder in religious circles as one of *merit*, the opposite of *sola fide* (faith alone). Luther was fighting against a Roman church which remains to this day a system of meriting grace. But as we also saw, we Protestants have invented many ways of doing the same thing. Someone summarized this ladder as “the pursuit of behavior that conforms to a system of moral standards ... [where, be they from God or manmade taboos] Jesus becomes a means to the final end of ‘becoming more moral’ with the aim that one may ascend a little higher to God. Moralistic Spirituality appeals to the ‘will’ of man.”⁴ It is the natural desire of fallen man. We want to be “good,” and we want to do it ourselves.

Speculation

The ladder of speculation (Michael Horton calls it “Fascination with the Mysterious”⁵) is sung by Rush. This

⁴ Matthew Richard, “Saying Goodbye To The Ladder,” *PM Notes* (May 3, 2010), <http://www.pastormatrichard.com/2010/05/saying-good-bye-to-ladder.html>, last accessed Oct 18, 2017.

⁵ Michael Horton, “Fascinations that Lead Away from the Cross...” *Modern Reformation* 6:4 (July/Aug 1997), 12-13.

one is not as obvious as Huey's ladder of moralism, but it is clearly what is going on, albeit from another secular-humanistic point of view. Curiously, this song comes immediately after their song "Freewill" on their album *Permanent Waves*:

The clouds prepare for battle
In the dark and brooding silence
Bruised and sullen storm clouds
Have the light of day obscured
Looming low and ominous
In twilight premature
Thunder heads are rumbling
In a distant overture...

All at once, the clouds are parted
Light streams down in bright unbroken beams...

Follow men's eyes as they look to the skies
The shifting shafts of shining weave the fabric of their dreams...⁶

That's fairly obscure poetry, but how is this Jacob's Ladder song a kind of religious speculation? A fan writes of this song, "Depending on one's point of view, this song could portray a battle between good and evil, God and Satan, an

⁶ Rush, "Jacob's Ladder," *Permanent Waves*, Anthem, 1979.

epic sky battle between warring factions (be they deities, armies, or whatever), or simply, as Neil Peart [the drummer for Rush] stated, a dramatization of a stormy day before the sun eventually breaks through.”⁷ But no matter what the interpretation, how would anyone ever really know any of this? It is a speculative assent to the heavens.

The speculative ladder **appeals to the mind or intellect**. The West saw an entire movement called Rationalism, which gave way to the secularism of modern society. Speculation tries to peak at God apart from special revelation, seeking to know things about him that he has not told us.

In Luther’s day, this was what the medieval scholastic doctors of the church were doing. Again, Protestants have their own versions of it, both Liberal and Conservative, anti-Confessional and Confessional. He summarized the problem in his famous **Heidelberg Disputation**, a series of 40 proverbial statements intended to be discussed publicly. Eleven of are written directly against the speculative

⁷ Carl, Michigan, comments section on “Jacob’s Ladder by Rush,” Songfacts, <http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=3107>

theology of **Aristotle**, whom the Academy of his day was completely ga-ga over. He writes:

19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened.
29. He who wishes to philosophize by using Aristotle without danger to his soul must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ.

Notice how he focuses in on the foolishness in Christ as opposed to philosophical speculation. Why? Because Christ is an historical, knowable figure, God's clear and knowable, specific and understandable revelation about himself to us.

Mystical

The third **ladder of mysticism** (Horton: the Miraculous) is sung by **Mark Wills**. In a deeply twisted country song that mocks Genesis, he sings about probably the single most popular mystical ladder (and there are many of them) of our day: sex.

So late one night by the harvest moon
Jacob climbed a ladder up to Rachael's room

He knew his place, it was right beside her
Step by step up to her world
Head over heels for a brown-eyed girl
And gettin' caught didn't seem to matter
'Cause heaven was waitin' at the top of Jacob's ladder⁸

Mystical spirituality appeals to **the emotions**. In it “mankind pursues consciousness of ultimate reality with God through direct emotional experiences and mystical insights.”⁹ From new-agers to Gnostics to the influx of Eastern religions to drugs that seek alternate realities, America is saturated with mystical spirituality. Hollywood sells it like candy. TV Christianity can’t get enough of it. For Luther, it was the Catholic mystics like **Teresa of Avila** and **St. John of the Cross** that gave him no end of heartburn (you thought it was all that beer). Evangelicalism is brimming over with it, as it seeks to manipulate man *and God* through every conceivable emotional tool available. For example, there is almost no worship service you can go to that is not intentionally created to manipulate your

⁸ **Mark Wills**, “Jacob’s Ladder,” *Mark Wills*, Mercury, 1996.

⁹ Richard, *ibid.*

emotions.¹⁰ Curiously, in a passage we will come back to, Calvin realized the subtlety of all this as he commented on 1 Corinthians 1, “They were persons who did not openly take away anything from the substance of the gospel, but, as they burned with a misdirected eagerness for distinction, I am of the opinion that, with the view of making themselves admired, they contrived *a new method of teaching, at variance with the simplicity of Christ*” (emphasis mine).¹¹ These methods are nothing more than climbing up the ladder to peak at God in ways he has not permitted or prescribed in his holy word.

The Real Jacob’s Ladder

In the Bible, there actually is a ladder between heaven and earth. Though it is more properly speaking a cosmic mountain or a ziggurat like the Tower of Babel, we’ll stick with “ladder” for the sake of our theme.¹² It appears in the Israelite town of Bethel (House of God) in the days of Jacob, hence “Jacob’s Ladder.”

¹⁰ For the mystics, Jesus was basically superfluous, a means to the end of being “One” with God. Teresa especially borders on pantheistic theology. Any time you hear another Mary sighting in Catholic circles, you can be sure that you are dealing with mystical ladder climbing.

¹¹ John Calvin and John Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 39.

¹² See my sermon “Jacob’s Ladder,” Genesis 28:10-22.

Jacob had a dream. He dreamed that he saw a “ladder” on the earth and the top reached to heaven (**Gen 28:12**). There were figures going up and down on it, but they were not men! Rather, they were the angels. Then he saw the LORD standing above it (**13**). He said, “**I am the LORD (Yahweh), the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac.**” There, the LORD gave the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob (**13-15**). When Jacob awoke, he realized that God was in *THIS* place (**16**). He realized that this was the house of God and the gate of heaven (**17**).

How are we to understand this? Much of the history of interpretation on it, in both Judaism and Christianity, has been allegorical. The Rabbis realized that the **gematria** (numerical value of the letters) of the ladder (*slm*) and Sinai (*syny*) are identical.¹³ Therefore, the ladder symbolized the Law (*torah*). As we will see in a passage from John 5, it isn't a stretch from here to merit as the Pharisees we so prone to climbing. Among Christians, we find especially among the monastic Fathers ideas of improving ourselves one rung at a

¹³ SLM: S + 60 + L = 30 + M = 40 = 130. SYNY = 60 + Y = 10 + N = 50 + Y = 10 = 130. See Genesis Rabbah 68. “**What God showed Jacob was the Sinai Event**” (Ba'al Haturim, in Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Present at Sinai: The Giving of the Law* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1999), 158. This is actually a fascinating interpretation that has some validity, but like all Torah thinking with the Rabbis, it falls short because it misses the Giver of the Torah--Christ.

time or how Moses climbed the ladder to enter into heaven.¹⁴ So there is much moral and mystical ladder climbing here.

But Jesus says in John's Gospel, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:51). He self-consciously identifies himself as Jacob's Ladder. In other words, this is not Jacob's ladder; it is Jesus' ladder! Importantly, there are only two verses in John which mention ascending and descending in the same verse. The other is John 3:13. "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of man." This again reminds us of the ladder. But this time, as soon as the words are out of our Lord's mouth, he connects them to another OT story via the word "and" (*kai*). In other words, this ascending and descending has an ultimate purpose. What was this purpose? "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-

¹⁴ The Wiki on Jacob's Ladder (as of Oct 18, 2017) has a section [Origen](#) (Homily n. 27 on Numbers 33:1-2), [Gregory of Nazanzus](#) (Homily n. 43, Funeral Oration on St. Basil, 71), [Gregory of Nyssa](#), Life of Moses 224-227, and [John Chrysostom](#), The Homilies on the Gospel of St. John n. 83.5.

15). In other words, he connects the ladder directly to the cross.

What we have just looked at in these two brief passages from John is the very heart and soul of *solus Christus*. The chief focus of *solus Christus* as it has been presented for the past 500 years has been Christ **as he is to be preached**. Christ alone is opposed to so many other things. In a recent sermon on this subject, Ian Hamilton puts it this way,

Not Christ plus the intercession of the saints

Not Christ plus the seven sacraments

Not Christ plus the treasury of merits

Not Christ plus Mary

Not Christ plus my good works ...

Not Christ plus my Reformed Confessions

Not Christ plus my confessional preaching

Not Christ plus evangelical obedience

Not Christ plus the Church's absolution

We add nothing to him.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ian Hamilton, "9 – Solus Christus: The Preaching that Defined the Reformation," Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary Conference 2017, 13 of 13 (8-26-2017), <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=824172246294>, last accessed Oct 18, 2017. This list was taken from two different parts of the sermon.

This is usually put in terms of that one vital subject that we just saw, the subject which alone kills all ladder climbing: the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Thus, by *solus Christus*, what is usually meant is what Paul said to the Corinthians in the same passage Calvin was thinking of earlier, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power ... For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1Co 1:17; 2:2).

I want to proclaim *solus Christus* to you in this way as well, but with the cross coming as the climatic work of a Jesus who needs in our day to be preached even more broadly and basically than even dying and all he did on earth that lead up to it. What do I mean by a Jesus that needs to be preached more broadly and basically than the cross? Let’s ask a question. On what textual basis could Jesus make such a direct link between the ladder and the cross and himself? Did he just make it up? Did he see something in the text itself that caused him to do this? Let’s let our Lord speak again.

He summarized a serious problem of the Pharisees in John 5, “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” (John 5:39-40). In another place, Jesus said something similar, albeit with very different circumstances and people in mind. He told his downcast disciples three days after his death, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

We could spend a lot of time trying to understand these two passages. And Christians have not all agreed on just how Christ is there in the OT.¹⁶ But all Christians do agree that in some way, somehow the OT is about Him. What concerns me, and what I want to tell you about first today, is perhaps the most basic way that he is in the OT. It is a way that is missed by far too many Christians, and as such,

¹⁶ See for example the recent book Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde (eds), *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2009). This book gives as it says three Evangelical views on this subject. But curiously, I have not found my own view represented in any of these essays. All three are fundamentally missing what we are going to discuss below.

“Christ alone” has suffered greatly in the messages of our pulpits.

The problem is illustrated by those **red-letter Bibles**. Those Bibles reveal a bias, namely, that **Jesus only spoke certain words** in the Gospels, nowhere else. This betrays a fundamental misreading of the OT. Jesus is the God of the OT who spoke to the Prophets, who met and knew the Patriarchs, who took Israel to be his treasured possession. If I were going to create a red-letter Bible, every single word of it would be in red letters. Because *Jesus is the Word of God*.

This is why and how he was able to make these two statements above about himself in the OT. He wasn't making this up. Rather, was reading the OT the way it teaches us to read it. With Christ as the God of Israel who speaks both on his own behalf and on behalf of the Father who sent (cf. **Gen 24:7; Ex 23:20; 33:2**; etc.) him. Beloved, this is our Faith, and it is vital that we recover this aspect of *solus Christus*. This is the first of two things I want to tell you about now. The second, again, is the cross. To best understand that (our *kerygma*/message of Christ crucified), you must understand Christ's self-understanding of who he

believed that he was and claimed that he was using the language of the Old Testament itself. I want to **look at several words now** (many of which are in the first chapter of John 1: Word, Name, Glory, Son, God) that are used either by Jesus or his disciples that teach you that Christ is the God of the OT.

WHO JESUS SAID THAT HE WAS

Christ is Yahweh (Second Yahweh) of the OT

I'll begin by asking again, why and how does Jesus make this connection between the ladder of Jacob and the cross upon which he will die? At the root, the answer must be that the ladder of Jacob *in the OT itself* has to do with Christ. We do not need to go looking for hidden and dark meanings in the OT to see Christ here. Rather, he is here in plain sight through the ordinary language of the text itself. You just need eyes to see him.

Who was there above that ladder? Yahweh (“LORD” our first word). It says **Yahweh** was “**standing**” there. Far from a figure of speech, I take this more literally. Jacob *saw* Yahweh *standing*. Now think about this. Scripture says, “**No**

one has ever seen God” (Jn 1:18; 1Jn 4:12). Yet, Jacob saw the LORD standing above the ladder. We have to make sense of this.

When John says this, he means either the Father in heaven (possibly John 5:37) or God in his Divine Essence, whom we know is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. No one has seen God *like this*, for it is impossible to see him unveiled and live (Ex 33:19). Now, to see God is to know God, and this is the reason why all forms of ladder climbing are impossible. You cannot climb to that which you cannot know of yourself. You cannot reach up to heaven through your will, intellect, or emotions to bring God down to you. Using the picture here, God is utterly above all, on the top of a ladder that no man can climb.

If Jacob (and others) did in fact see God (and the texts say they did), then he saw God *in Christ*. As John says, “No one may see God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18). This amazing verse has only one God, and yet two God’s in this verse! This is OT theology. The OT sees at least two Yahwehs, though it also says that there is only one God and only God is Yahweh. “Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur

and fire from the LORD out of heaven” (Gen 19:24). The prophet Amos, speaking to this same Yahweh hears the LORD say, “I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (Amos 4:10). Again, same thing. Or again with Zechariah, “For thus said the LORD of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you ... ‘Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who served them. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me’” (Zech 2:8-9). As Augustine says here, “Zechariah ... plainly declares that the Almighty sent the Almighty” (City of God 20.30). John’s just doing the same thing that Moses, Amos, and Zechariah did. He’s talking about the Son.

The point is, this is precisely why Jesus talks about “descending.” Jacob sees Christ standing on top of that ladder/mountain. What Jesus is doing is saying that since we can’t ascend to him, he will descend to us. If we can’t make it up, he will come down. Only when he does this, can we know God. Jacob did not climb up to heaven. He *looked* up to the LORD who was in heaven, saw him, and this anticipated the need for this same LORD to come down to

earth. This is Christ. But make no mistake, **Jacob saw Christ** and he called him Yahweh. Christ was there.

Christ the Angel of the LORD—the Man

A little later in the story of Jacob, he called him a “**man**.” Not a *hu*-man. But someone who was like a human. And this “man” (*‘ish*. In Hebrew, only men are called *‘adam*. But angels and men are both called *‘ish*) descended to Jacob. In the first WrestleMania, Jacob wrestled with a man. When he figured out who this man was he said, “**I have seen God face to face**” (**Gen 32:30**). Now the word is “God” (Elohim). But, no one has seen God, in his Essence. Therefore, Jacob saw and wrestled with Christ. And he understood full well that this was God, but not the Father. But who was this “man?”

A parallel passage is the birth narrative of Samson tells us. It is parallel because in the Jacob story the old Deceiver asks this man’s name and he replies, “**Why is it that you ask my name?**” (**32:29**). In the Samson story, Samson’s father asks the same question to “**the Angel of the LORD**” (**Jdg 13:17**). He responds similarly, “**Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful**” (**18**). Is it any wonder then that Hosea would talk about the Jacob story and say, “**He strove with**

the Angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us—the LORD, the God of hosts, the LORD is his memorial name” (Hos 12:4-5).

Jacob’s great confession at the end of his life was, “The God before whom my fathers ... walked, the God who has been my shepherd ... the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil” (Gen 48:15-16). Jacob’s God (think about that) was the Angel of the LORD: The God of hosts, Moses’ man of war, Joshua’s commander of the armies of the LORD. Jacob knew Christ and the text couldn’t be any plainer or easier to understand if you want to believe what it actually, literally says. But so many either don’t believe it or simply have never seen it—Christ alone *in the OT*.

Christ the Name of the LORD

This Angel is said to bear the “**Name**” (which is why he is the Angel of the LORD. “**My Name is in him**” (Ex 23:21). In a prophecy, Isaiah has “the Name” as an actual person. “**Behold, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of fury, and his tongue is like a devouring fire...**” (Isa 30:27).

The Name is a “he” (one of the “names that are named;” Eph 1:21). In John 1:12, the OT children of Israel “received him” by “believing in God’s Name” (John 1:12). Vitally, Jesus sees himself *as this Name*. This is why he prays in his great High Priestly prayer, “I made known to them your Name” (John 17:26). Jesus is identifying as the Name of the OT. Hence, the early Christians could be said “to suffer dishonor” simply “for the Name” (Acts 5:41). This is why Peter would say there is no other name under heaven by which we may be saved (Acts 4:12). This is why Paul tells Timothy (citing Isaiah 26:13 LXX), “Let everyone who names the Name of the Lord depart from iniquity” (2Tim 2:19).

Christ the Face/Image of the LORD

The Angel is said to be “the face” or “presence” (*panim*) of God (Ex 23:20; Isa 63:9). This and this alone is how Moses could be said to speak with God “face to face, as a man speak to his friend” (33:9, 11). This is not a mere figure of speech. Moses is talking to the Angel of the LORD, the Face of God. We do use “face” this way even in English. John Elway is said to be “the face of the Broncos.” You can’t see

“the Broncos,” but if you have seen John Elway, you have seen the Broncos. So also, Jesus says, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). He is the Face of God. Using this OT language of the Angel, Paul says, “[God] has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). The language is very close to “image” (see 2Co 3:18). You are not to have any graven “images,” because *in the OT*, the image of God is the Angel. In the NT, Jesus is said to be “the exact imprint of [God’s] nature” (Heb 1:3), “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). When the OT speaks of wanting to be in God’s presence, or seeing God’s face, they are speaking of Christ—The Angel of the LORD.

So Many More...

We could do this all day, for Christ is **the Word** of God in the OT, the Word whom Abram saw with his eyes (Gen 15:1). He is **the Wisdom** of God, wisdom who is said to have created the world (Prov 8:30), and whom Paul says we see in the face of Christ (Col 2:3). He is **the Power** of God (1Co 1:24; Heb 1:3). He is **the Son** of God (Ps 2:7-8). He is **the**

Arm of God, **the Right Hand** of God, **the Glory** of God, and more.

The point this is when we speak of Christ alone, part of what we mean must be that Jesus Christ is the main character of the OT, personally present, speaking, and known by the people. Obviously *not the same way* as the NT, for he was not a human being then. Nevertheless, he was there. Not only was he there, he literally is the God of Israel who was given Israel by the Father (he also takes them for himself, because he is God) and who represents Israel to the Father.

Until we get a clear handle on this again, the church will forever be impoverished and her preaching will be sub-Christian at certain points, important points. Christianity is a religion of the whole Book—the NT *and* OT. **Until we get a grasp** on this, people will constantly be saying that you have no right to see Christ there or they will continue to feel the need to make up stuff that need not be because they know what they are supposed to see, but don't understand why or how to see it. **Until we figure this out**, she will be much more prone to disembodiment of the OT law like the Pharisees did, turning it all into moralistic rungs of a ladder. She will be much more likely to do speculative theology,

especially in the realm of the doctrine of God where abstractions and Unitarian ideas abound all because people can't see Christ in certain places. They feel like they must think about God apart from his revelation of himself to us in Christ. And this is no more important than in the OT, where so many speculative doctrines arise because of an inability to see that in such verses, it is the Son of God that is being described. And **until we figure this out**, she will be much more easily swayed by emotional manipulations and mystical encounters because, like Philip, people are simply not able or satisfied with seeing Christ alone. People want power encounters with God or the Father. Only that will satisfy them. Christ alone is able to quench these thirst's for glory through ladder climbing.

JESUS TOLD YOU WHY HE CAME

This leads to my second point, which is the need to be satisfied now, not in an angelic encounter (which is what they had in the OT), but **in the frail humanity** of the God man and in his purpose for coming to earth. If the church has been greatly impoverished by the first point, without the

second point, her entire message and purpose ceases to exist. We have survived by God's grace without seeing Christ anywhere near the way we should have in the OT for a thousand years. But at the Reformation, they at least were able to recover the only message that actually saves.

Why did Jesus tell us that he came? “The Son of man came ... to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). This is exactly what we saw with the ladder/cross connection. Jesus descended down that long stairway in a way that only God could do, into the womb of a virgin, taking on human nature, becoming man and living among us. We did not go up. He came down, and he became lowly and humble and meek.

The language of *servicing* comes from Isaiah. For Christ in the OT is also the *Servant*, the Servant who suffers. “He grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa 53:2). Salvation would not come by an Angel of Glory, but by a man whom no one gave a second glance.

To give your life is to die. To do it as a ransom is to become a kind of substitution in the place of another. “For

your sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2Co 5:21). God “laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6).

This is what we call **the preaching of the cross**, and Paul says he decided to know nothing among the churches other than this (1Co 2:2). Not that every single sermon has to fit some kind of a rigid grid that forces round pegs into cross shaped holes, but that the cross becomes the thing that lays everyone bare, eliminates all attempts at self-effort to reach up to God, because it provides the only thing that can be done to save sinners, and it is something that God himself decided to do completely apart from any of our votes.

The Apostle says that this message is **two things** to a dying world. To the Jew is it **a stumbling block** (1Co 1:23). Why? Partly, it is because even by the time of the NT, **many of them had given up believing their own Scriptures**. They could not believe that there was any other Person in a Godhead besides the Father, certainly no one equal in every way with him. Judaism had become a majority held Unitarian religion, as it stands to this day. Therefore, the Messiah they were looking for was simply a man. So they stumbled over the Stumbling Stone.

This has everything to do with my first point. Isaiah says, “And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Isa 8:14). Who? “The LORD of hosts” (13). The text literally says it. The LORD of hosts will become a stone of offense. And who is that? Christ, whom we have seen is there throughout.

Here’s an important point. Many people accept that Jesus is the Christ who did these things simply because the NT says it, not realizing that the Apostles were grounding everything, *staking everything* on what the OT said about these things. People who stop to think about this stance of just believing “because” for even a moment start to become concerned that the Disciples were making it all up. And if most are right, and Jesus physically in the OT, then frankly, they were. Not seeing Christ in the OT becomes a huge obstacle to not receiving his work on the cross for many people, and this is a serious problem that needs to stop.

The NT says repeatedly that this happened when the LORD of hosts became a man in fulfillment of this “Immanuel” (Isa 8:8) “God with us” (10) prophecy (Rom 9:32-33; 1Pe 2:8). Do you see that? If you don’t see Christ

in the OT as a living person whom Isaiah knew (see [John 12:41](#); [Isa 6:1](#)), then on what basis can God himself become a man? If Isaiah didn't know about a Trinity in one way or another, then you are left with a Divine Essence becoming a man, and that is not what either Testament teaches.

The other reason is that they could not believe that God would forsake their Messiah. “[Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree](#)” ([Deut 21:23](#); [Gal 3:13](#); see Calvin on [1Co 1:22](#)). Put these together and you have a stumbling stone, and people trip right over Christ headlong to their own eternal destruction.

To everyone else, [the cross is foolishness](#). Why? There are many reasons. Among them, all the Gentiles knew of the gods, so adding one more wasn't the problem. The problem was first that [God decided to become a man](#). Not in a disguise like Zeus often did. But a real, living, breathing, human being. Second, this God actually cared about mortals, so much that he would die *for the worst* of them. No god ever did that. Third, that's it. There's nothing more for man to do other than receive it. It is a basic, simple message. But the Greeks loved wisdom and embellishment and flowery speech and rhetorical acumen and great debates and

philosophical speculations. It is a pride issue. But here, there is none of that. The cross robs the wise of their most boastful prize, their own intelligence. And in it, the foolishness of God shows itself to be greater than the wisdom of the world.

Earlier I told you of Luther saying, “That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened.” This is profoundly anti-speculation and anti-mysticism. The very next words he wrote were, “But that person deserves to be called a theologian who comprehends what is visible of God through suffering and the cross.” This one is anti-merit. But it is all Christ alone.

Martin Luther got it, and he shared that message with everyone he knew, and God was pleased through that preaching to change the world. What would recovery of these two things: Christ as really and truly there in the OT and Christ and him crucified do to our world today? Many do not even know these two simple things about Jesus and they’ve sat in churches for decades. We’ve lost confidence in the object of the Gospel to change our world. So we don’t preach it and therefore, people don’t know it.

Yet God is still God, and though Christ now sits exalted in heaven, enthroned high above, he does so as one of us, man in eternally resurrected flesh, demonstrating that long ago, he descended the ladder that we could not climb. Christianity alone of all the world's religions is not about ladder climbing, but ladder descending. God with us—Immanuel.

His cross is the pinnacle of his own works on our behalf, and therefore is the salvific nexus between heaven and hell. Here and here alone is where destinies are decided. Here is where some will finally find themselves ascending, which others must descend to the depths below because they will not trust in the only hope of reconciliation to God. Can you ascend? By grace alone, through faith alone, *in Christ alone* you can. Because that is what God is pleased to do for those whom he has called. Believe these things today, and he will bring you to himself on that Day. And when you get there you can boast of one thing: That Christ alone, the God of Israel, suffered and died for your sins and was raised to life for your justification. To the Glory of God alone ... which we will look at next time.