

Christ Community Covenant Church
God's Messengers: 'Prophet-ing as a Lost Art'
Pastor Dave Scherrer - January 15, 2012

Two weeks ago we looked at **the Sovereign Will of God and his Will of Command.**
Last week we looked at the idea that **we reap what we sow - for better or for worse.**
This week, a snappy summary for today might be; **"You say jump, I say how high?"**

Today we are going to see how God's history plays itself out in God's grace. As I noted last week we learned that we reap what we sow, **except for the grace of God.** What we have earned is death. The wages of sin is death scripture tells us, but the free gifts of God, his unmerited favor has made a way for us to be free from that penalty. He is offering life! In the same way God's grace regularly transformed what Satan intended for evil and turns it to good for those who believe in God and are called according to his purposes.

The Divided Kingdoms: Their Kings and Prophets



The Divided Kingdom,
10th - 6th Century BCE.

Northern Kingdom	19 Kings, all evil	Six Prophets
Southern Kingdom	20 Kings, 8 good	Fourteen Prophets

[Handout]

After David died, his son Solomon became king and he made Israel wealthy and famous among all the nations of the world. Solomon's one mistake was that he married foreign wives. These women brought their foreign gods and idols into Israel, and it was not long before idolatry spread throughout Israel. When Solomon died the kingdom was split in two, the Northern Kingdom consisted of ten of the tribes and was called Israel, and the Southern Kingdom consisted of two of the tribes (Judah and Benjamin) and was called Judah.

Every king in the 200 year history of the Northern kingdom of Israel was evil, but in the Southern Kingdom of Judah eight of the kings followed the Lord, and when they brought the people back to God the nation prospered. But when they disobeyed the Lord great problems would arise.

It was during this time that God raised up certain "prophets" who were His mouthpieces. They would speak out against sin and idolatry and would continually warn of God's judgment. Some of

the prophets spoke out in the North and some in the South, but God was faithfully warning them of certain catastrophe if they would not turn to him.

In 722 BC the Assyrians came down and conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and took the ten tribes away never to be seen again. The prophets had continually warned them but the judgment finally came. Hosea and Joel were two of the more famous prophets that had warned the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to repent and turn away from the false gods.

The Southern Kingdom had continued to follow the Lord in an on and off again fashion, but they finally turned away from God and became totally corrupt. In 586 BC (136 years after the nation of Israel was captured) the Babylonians came and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of Solomon and carried the Jews away to Babylon. God continued to send prophets to encourage the Hebrews that their captivity would only last 70 years.

This week we are going to turn our attention to these prophets, what are sometimes referred to as a mouthpiece for God. They serve as God's messenger, just as the title of the chapter describes.

Why send prophets anyway?

Prophets tell the truth not future. In the case of these Kingdom prophets, they often told of an impending judgment or discipline of the Lord due to the disobedience of the King and the people. They didn't need a crystal ball to know this would happen. Remember the spiritual law of reaping what you sow. God had already declared in the time of Moses that there would be divine judgment to His people if they followed false gods.

Prophets are a testimony of God's patience. In the case of the Northern kingdom the patience of God lasted over two hundred years. In 722 BC the Assyrians came and carried the ten tribes of the northern Kingdom away into oblivion. Then it was another 140 years before the Southern tribe was taken away by Babylon. All told the two Kingdoms of the nation of God's chosen people tried God's patience for 340 years.

Prophets were there to defend God's character. When the people of God acted disobediently, their character reflected poorly on Yahweh. Other nations looked at the Israelites and assumed that they were doing as their god commended. Prophets were sent by God to defend His Name and His character.

Prophets told signs of a coming messiah. The prophets Isaiah and many of the Minor Prophets gave hints of a coming savior. Mostly these hints went unnoticed or ignored. By the time of Jesus, the people were looking for a King coming in power not the suffering savior predicted in Isaiah.

Being a prophet is not for cowards!

Prophets place their lives on the line in declaring God's truth – They usually suffer and often die. Take for instance the life of Jeremiah.

- Jeremiah was targeted for persecution and death by his enemies. When he complained to God of his attackers, God told him not to worry, it would get worse. And it did, he was beaten, placed in stocks and persecuted.
- The acts of obedience God asked Jeremiah to do made him a target of mockery. He recounts how if he tries to shut the word of the Lord inside and not mention God's name, the word becomes like fire in his heart and he is unable to hold it in. The experiences are so troubling for Jeremiah, that he expresses regret at ever being born.

But there is something about the character of these prophets – they simply said "How High?" They set their wills on following the will of God regardless of the personal cost. It was almost as though they were compelled. Something inside them would not let them back down.

But if I say, "I will not remember Him
Or speak anymore in His name,"
Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire
Shut up in my bones;
And I am weary of holding *ʾin*,
And I cannot endure *ʾi*.

The curious case of Elijah and Jezebel

1 Kings 18:16b-18

So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals.

¹⁹ Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."²⁰ So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. ²¹ Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

But the people said nothing.

²² Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. ²³ Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God."

Then all the people said, "What you say is good."

²⁵ Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire."²⁶ So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. ²⁷ At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened."²⁸ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. ²⁹ Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel."³² With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. ³³ He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood."

³⁴ "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. ³⁵ The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. ³⁶ At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "**LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and**

Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.

³⁷ Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” ³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. ³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!” ⁴⁰ Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

Now you would think that this would be enough to keep Elijah’s spirit pretty high. Not so. All it takes is one little phone call from Jezebel and Eli is running scared!

1 Kings 19:1-5

¹ Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”

You remember I said these prophets were different – devoted and fearless. Maybe I should say that is ***mostly true***. Even the most dedicated prophet can grow weary and become full of fear that makes you want to run and hide. Jezebel was relentless and Elijah saw a threat in her threats that chilled him to the core.

The relentless-ness of Evil and the need for a modern day prophet

My take away for us today comes right in here. We need to understand that Evil is more than a bad day, or unfortunate circumstances. There is a presence in our world that is Evil itself, a living presence. And this evil presence is relentless and pursuing, like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. The world is looking for someone who will stand up and speak for God regardless of the personal costs. Jesus himself promised that the world would get evilier and evilier. I believe that is true.

Matthew 24:9-14

“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

So if a prophet were to come to our world today . . .

What would a prophet say today?

You have become too consumed with the world – “You have lost your first love”

Barna survey found that 8 out of 10 teens could not describe how to apply their faith to their everyday lives. Chuck Colson found that only 4% of believers make decisions out of a Christian world view.

Your lifestyle lacks salt and light - “You are a light on a hill”

We are to live our lives in such a way that our words and deeds testify about God – that we speak life and light into the lives of those who are disenfranchised, who are living a lie, who are pursuing darkness.

You have defiled the marriage bed – “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery.”

Sins of sexuality have a particularly devastating effect on us as individuals and a culture. The very first sin had the effect of exposing their nakedness and resulted in being ashamed and the pair trying to hide from God. We are to be different as Christians and we need to set our standards of purity and sanctity very far from the world.

You have tolerated a culture of death – “I came to give you life”

This is Sanctity of Human Life week. This whole idea has become politicized and it is not and never should have been about politics. The issues regarding the sanctity of human life are profoundly spiritual. God is life and death is an abomination of his character. When sin came into the world as a result of our choices, death too entered the world. And since then the story of God has been to rectify and redeem this state of death we now live in.

Do you remember how God said in Deuteronomy 30 to “choose life?” This is the pro-choice choice that God is demanding.

¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God.

Video and Wednesday night opportunity

There are a thousand ways to stand up for life. Quit buying and playing video games that romanticize death and war. Support your local pro life crisis pregnancy center as an alternative to abortion. Come alongside adoption agencies that are under crisis right now. Support Hope House and other ministries of a similar form that give support to women who have chosen to carry their babies to full term. Become part of a movement that stands up against human trafficking and forced sexual behavior.

Come home before it is too late – “Fix your eyes on Jesus”

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.