

PROPHET OF PROPHETS

Acts 3:17-26 NIV

Last Sunday, we began looking at the men of Israel's reaction to God healing a cripple who for many years had to be carried to the temple gate called Beautiful where he begged from those entering the temple courts.

Now able to enter the temple courts on his healed legs, his shouting and leaping about provided an opportunity for Peter to explain to an astonished crowd:

¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see. (Acts 3:16)

Peter explained that God had sent His Servant Jesus to them – the men of Israel - but they had disowned Him and handed Him over to be killed, requesting Pilate release a murderer to them instead of the Author of Life.

The evidence was clear. The facts were indisputable. God's Messiah was sentenced to death by those He came to serve and to save.

What Peter is about to say next should remind us of Jesus' words from the cross: **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34)

¹⁷ "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹ Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²² For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.' (Acts 3:17-23)

When most people hear the word prophet, they think of someone who is able to reveal the future. Someone like Nostradamus, one of the most famous so-called prophets, who is claimed to have predicted many world events and is assumed to have made prophecies about things which have yet to happen.

Another example: according to a certain calendar, December 21, 2012 may mark the beginning of a new era or the end of the world.

These kinds of prophecy are exciting, because they promise to reveal to us things that have yet to come.

Horoscopes, which claim to be able through their vague wordings to tell you what your day will be like, are very popular. People like the idea that they will have power over their day by reading their horoscope and anticipating what will happen.

And, for only a small fortune in phone costs, a prophetic matchmaker can tell you what will happen with your love life with astonishing accuracy.

This is nothing new with our generation. From recorded history forward, people have sought to look into what will happen by tossing bones, cutting open chickens, or consulting the Lucky Eight Ball.

Biblically, there are prophets who tell about things that are going to happen. For example, much of Isaiah is prophecy which looked forward to the coming of Christ. Passages like, **"...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed,"** (Isaiah 53:5) for example.

Even King David played the role of prophet at times. He wrote Psalm 22 which foretells Jesus' crucifixion in chilling detail, telling about Jesus' feelings of being forsaken, the insults that were hurled at him, the wounds in his hands and feet, and even the fact that the Roman guards divided his garments between them. Although, at the time, it was hard for those who studied scripture to accurately read the prophecies concerning Jesus; but, we can look back in hindsight and see that his birth, life, death, and resurrection were all foretold by prophets.

As fascinating as all this future telling is, this is not the main function of a prophet. The prophet had a much higher and much more important calling than telling about what would happen down the road. Now, what could be more exciting or important than telling God's people about God's future plans? How about telling people what God was thinking here and now and what He wants His people to know?

The main function of the prophet was to speak the very words of God, often a message of warning or a call to right living. Think about what a bold claim the prophet made. The prophets were making the assertion that the words they spoke were not just a clever message or good advice, they were not just wise words to be heeded; no, they were the words straight from God; words that God wanted spoken.

That's a pretty bold claim, to say the least; for it implies that God has chosen the prophet to be His mouthpiece and that the words spoken were to be taken with the same authority as Scripture. No wonder the punishment for being a false prophet was death... the false prophet was making false claims about God.

Notice in the Bible that in most cases, when God calls a prophet, the prophet would do everything possible to get out of the job, for it's no small thing to claim to speak for God.

Peter mentions Moses; so let's use Moses as an example.

God told Moses to go to the Hebrew people and to Pharaoh to speak for Him. Moses refused to go, giving in only when God continued to insist.

Think about what God was asking Moses to do. He was called to go and stand in front of the most powerful and dangerous man in the country and tell him that God wanted him to let the Hebrew people go free. Not only did Moses feel unworthy of such a task, he was probably also afraid for his life.

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophet was God's early warning system. When God had an urgent message for his people, the prophet would deliver the message - that usually fell on deaf ears - and would often put the prophet's life in danger.

Jesus made an interesting statement about prophets when some Pharisees warned him that Herod wanted to kill him. He told the Pharisees: **“Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’³³ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”**

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. (Luke 13:32-34)

So the prophet had at least two functions: deliver God's message about the future; deliver God's message about the present.

The preacher, or evangelist, can serve as a prophet, as Peter is doing with these men of Israel.

Even though they acted in ignorance, they non-the-less handed Jesus over to be crucified. And unless they wanted to face the consequences for this action, Peter calls for them to repent and turn to God. Repent and turn to God was part of the standard message delivered by the prophet.

When an individual comes to you with a question about a lifestyle that you see is

clearly destructive, they usually want you to affirm, not condemn what they are doing.

There are times when it is hard to say what God says. When somebody is living in sin and comes for advice, it would be a lot easier and agreeable to just go along with them. You don't win many friends by saying 'repent and turn to God.'

But, if we are to be faithful to the calling as a Christian, preacher, prophet, or evangelist, we must not tell them what they want to hear, or what we think, but what God thinks. Now, imagine a prophet who must stand before a nation and tell them that if they do not change their ways and obey God that they will be carried off into captivity and see their nation destroyed. Welcome to the life of the prophet!

A preacher had a brother who would fall asleep every Sunday as soon as he would start preaching. Preacher devised a plan to do something about it. He preached on Hell one Sunday, and just like clockwork, as soon as he began to preach, his brother was fast asleep.

When it came to making this point, the preacher pounded the pulpit and shouted: "If anybody wants to go to Hell, just let them stand up right now!"

Well, all his brother heard after being awakened from the pounding on the pulpit

was: "Stand up right now!" Of course the whole church just gasps at him for doing this and, of course, his brother was pretty embarrassed. All he could think of to say was: "Preacher, I don't know what we just voted on, but looks like you and me are the only ones for it."

There are times when it is hard to do what needs to be done, and it doesn't always turn out the way you planned.

But, when God makes the plan, the prophet can speak with confidence that the plan will come to pass. Moses predicted that a prophet was coming. Peter affirms to his Jewish brothers that he has arrived.

Moses predicted that God would send a prophet to His people, to speak God's Word, to save God's people. Jesus was sent by God to tell the world God's message of salvation.

Peter, speaking to the men of Israel, his brothers, makes it clear that Jesus is the Prophet foretold by Moses and sent to the world to speak for God.

As a prophet, Jesus delivered God's message to his disciples about the future.

"A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:32-33)

As a prophet, Jesus delivered God's message to his disciples about the present.

"I have revealed *your name* to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. (John 17:6-10)

Jesus is many things to many people. He is a martyr, a philosopher, a moral example. To some he is a stumbling block, a myth, a challenge. He is a priest, a king, a lamb. He is a mystery to some, but to those who are seeking God's Word and His will, Jesus is the Prophet. Not a prophet, but The Prophet, the most perfect and complete manifestation of God's Word. Is it any wonder that in the book of John Jesus is called the Word?

If you want to know what God wants you to know and to do, you need only

look at His Prophet, Jesus Christ, the very Word of God.

Peter, speaking like a prophet to his Jewish brothers, made Moses' prophesy clear to them:

'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.'

Listen to Jesus!