

Jonah: The Grumpiest Missionary

Overview of the Prophetic Office

Prayer: Holy Spirit, we praise you for inspiring the prophets to confront people with their sins, promise that a Savior would come, and predict his eternal kingdom. Continue to accomplish your will through the ministry of the Word among us and in the world. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

What comes to your mind when you hear the word "prophet"? *Give a thumbs up or thumbs down.*

- Someone on the street corner wearing a sandwich board that says: "Repent! The end is near!"
- An impassioned critic of modern society who calls for sweeping reform.
- A person who speaks about spiritual matters.
- A person who correctly predicts the future.
- A person who teaches the Word of God today.

We can see connections to each of these ideas in the biblical office of prophet:

- Every Old Testament prophet warned of the impending judgment of God and called for repentance; often, like street corner preachers, the OT prophets were also ignored or ridiculed.
- Many prophets challenged the "status quo" of the lifestyle of Israel. At times, they called for drastic reform of the entire society.
- The Bible uses the term "prophet" to describe other people who tried to speak about spiritual things, but were not speaking God's messages.
- Isaiah and Daniel are two clear examples of predicting the future (by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, of course). Isaiah foretold the Suffering Servant in chapters 52 and 53; Daniel saw a vision of four beasts, each of which pictured a future world power (Daniel 7).
- In Paul's letters, he writes about the gift of prophecy being part of the New Testament church. In the sense that pastors and teachers share God's Word with others, they are exercising the gift of prophecy. Really, any Christian who speaks God's Word to another person is using this gift.

A working definition of prophet, then, given this information is: "Someone who, by God's command and supplying, tells others what is on God's mind."

- At one point in time, this would include special revelation not only about the future, but about the past and present as well.
- In these days, special revelation has ceased, since God has given us his Word (**Hebrews 1:1-3**). Anyone who faithfully shares the Word is saying what is on God's mind.
- We can break this down to three categories. Biblically speaking, a prophet is someone who...
 - Speaks for God
 - Calls sinners to repentance
 - Points others to Jesus

Let's briefly touch on each of these subpoints today.

A prophet speaks for God

1. Look up **Exodus 4:14-16**. What was Aaron to do for Moses?

- a. Who was the prophet—Moses or Aaron?

2. We know about Moses' reluctance to accept the Lord's commission to lead Israel out of Egypt; that's the whole reason God brings Aaron into the equation. We've already discussed the reluctance of Jonah to serve God in this way; let's also look at **Isaiah 6:5-7** and **Jeremiah 1:6-9**. Do you find it disturbing or reassuring that these prophets of God felt so uneasy about the Lord's call?

3. Moses was not perfect man; he was a murderer. Mark, the writer of the second Gospel, abandoned Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary trip. Peter denied knowing Jesus (among other things). We know about David's sins and Paul's sins. We each are aware of our own failures. What good things can come from remembering these things when we consider the place each has had in God's plan of salvation?

A prophet calls sinners to repentance

4. Turn to **2 Samuel 12:1-14**.
 - a. Before we read these verses, let's recall what David had done to warrant a visit from the prophet Nathan.

 - b. For what reasons might Nathan have been reluctant to confront David?

 - c. In what way is Nathan's story similar to the tactic that Jesus uses in the parable of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:36-37**?

 - d. David confessed his sin and Nathan proclaimed God's forgiveness. Yet, there were still consequences for David's sins. If God forgives sins, why does he still allow the consequences of those sins to affect our lives? See **Hebrews 12:4-11**.
 - i. This is an important point to remember. Let's say someone confesses to their pastor that they committed a serious crime. Confession and absolution are necessary and good—they are the only means by which souls are truly healed. But the pastor would also do well to lead that person to see that there are legal consequences for their actions. Confession does not automatically make one immune to consequences. Something that has been suggested for pastors to say in a situation that involves a confession of sexual abuse of a child: "I'm glad we could go back to the fountain of grace together. Now, in light of that forgiveness, it would be good for you to call the police and tell them what you just told me. If you don't by *this time*, I am bound by my conscience and by love for you and others involved to turn you in."

5. Nathan seems to have been a trusted advisor of David, perhaps even a member of his cabinet, so to speak. It was good for Israel to have a prophet in the ear of the king. We see spiritual advisors in the White House still today. However, as we often see in modern examples, what does a prophet of the Lord stand to forfeit when he becomes too involved in politics or business?

6. What things might make us hesitant to call sinners in our lives—spouses, friends, extended family, fellow congregation members, children—to repentance?
 - a. What biblical reminders help break down our reluctance?

A prophet points to Jesus

7. Read **Isaiah 61:1-3**.
 - a. When Isaiah wrote words like these, could the people of his time be sure that the predictions would take place?
 - i. What piece was missing that likely introduced some doubt?

 - b. Note the pictures Isaiah uses to compare sin and its effects with forgiveness.

Sin

Forgiveness

8. Turn to **Luke 4:16-21**. Jesus declared that he fulfilled these words. Prophecies will often have “layers,” in a way. They will come true physically and spiritually. In what ways did Jesus fulfill the different aspects of this prophecy in both physical and spiritual senses?
 - a. What pitfalls come from focusing on only the physical aspects of prophetic fulfillment?

 - b. Same question but focusing on spiritual aspects.

9. When we read the prophets today, our focus can easily be drawn to the judgment for sin and punishment from God. That was certainly an element of their ministry. However, the long-range message of the prophets was that the Lord would do wonderful things for his people through the Messiah. Many people never got to see the culmination of these promises; still, how did the promises change their lives?

10. For what reasons are sections like Luke 4:16-21 or phrases like, “so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled” such key factors in helping us know and understand who Jesus is?

Jonah fits the parameters of a prophet. He spoke for God, just as God called him to do. His message, as we will touch on in just a few short weeks, was one of repentance and impending judgment. And, as we have already briefly seen in chapter two and will see again, Jonah’s prophetic ministry points to Jesus. So too for us. We are all called to proclaim God’s praises and the truth about Jesus; we are all to be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope we have. It may sound daunting but, if Moses and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Jonah could do it, so can we.

Next week: God’s Prophetic Message to the People—a closer look at the message we see coming through the Old Testament prophets, like Jonah, to the Israelites and other nations of those days. What do those words mean for us? Can we apply God’s judgment to current nations?

Closing Prayer CW 745 Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying v. 4
Let none hear you idly saying, “There is nothing I can do,”
while the multitudes are dying, and the Master calls for you.
Take the task he gives you gladly, let his work your pleasure be;
answer quickly when he calleth, “Here am I, send me, send me!” Amen.