

Series Theme: The Names of Jesus

Title: Jesus as Prophet

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Preacher: Rev. Joyce Donigian

Summary: Jesus fulfilled the three-part role of Prophet as described in the Old Testament: they brought God's word to the people, they warned the people regarding their behavior, and they performed miracles. He did all of these things and so much more.

Memory Verse: They exclaimed, "Surely he is the Prophet we have been expecting."
John 6:14b

THE FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON: Mark 8:27-29

THE SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON: John 1:19-27

Grace to you and peace from the One who is and who was and who is to come.

What comes to mind when you hear the word – prophecy? Although it isn't as popular as it was a generation ago, prophecy by self-styled prophets did make news then. Those who were making prophecies usually didn't call themselves prophets; they were more likely to refer to themselves as psychics or astrologers. And they usually called their pronouncements predictions but sometimes they were reported as prophecies.

Some of you may remember the name Jeanne Dixon from the 1960s. She was the author of several books, had a regular newspaper column, and each New Year her predictions were widely reported – front page news on those newspapers at the checkout counters of the local grocery store. Her popularity brought several other psychics into prominence as well. Even though they are not as popular now, psychics are still available on the Internet – there are several psychic network websites.

But the type of prophecy we read about in the Bible is quite different – since biblical prophets bore no resemblance to Jeanne Dixon and her friends. Yet it does seem that the Israelites needed prophets. There are a lot of them listed in the Old Testament. Think about it – there are the 12 "minor" prophets – whose writings make up the last books of the Old Testament; the "major" prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and earlier prophets like Nathan and Samuel, Elijah and Elisha all played important roles. Probably the best known prophet, although we don't usually think of him in that way, was Moses.

A prophet's primary function in the Old Testament was to serve as God's representative or ambassador by communicating God's word to God's people. True prophets never spoke on their own authority or shared their personal opinions, but rather delivered the message God gave them. They were "forth tellers," speaking the word of God, as opposed to the Jeanne Dixon types who marketed themselves as "foretellers," foretelling future events.

Old Testament prophets fulfilled three duties – they brought God’s word to the people, they warned the people regarding their behavior, and they performed miracles. Let me give you some examples. Certainly Moses performed miracles – the 10 plagues in Egypt, parting the Red Sea, bringing the 10 Commandments down from Mt. Sinai. Moses also spoke God’s words and obeyed God, even to the point of accepting that he would not enter the Promised Land after 40 years of wandering in the desert because that was the will of God.

The prophet Elijah raised a child from the dead and won, hands down, a confrontation with 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. He was the one who heard the still, small voice of God while hiding in a cave. And he entered heaven, not by death, but in a whirlwind.

The prophet Elisha, the disciple of Elijah, multiplied a widow’s tiny amount of oil and was able recover an ax head from the Jordan by bringing it to the surface and having it float there. Then there was Jonah and the whale, Nathan and King David, Samuel and King Saul – so many great stories in the Old Testament – and so many of them involve the prophets.

Other prophets spoke God’s words – Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, Jonah, and Amos, often began their prophetic books with the words, **“The word of the Lord that came to me…”**

One thing that can be said about almost all of the Old Testament prophets is that while they didn’t spent a lot of time doing miracles, they did spend a lot of time bringing God’s word to the people in hopes that they would listen and then behave in ways that would be pleasing to God. When the Israelites failed to heed the prophets’ words, then those prophets told them again and again what would happen to them if they continued in their rebellious ways. You can probably imagine that most of these prophets were unpopular. People don’t like to hear about things they need to change in order to please God. But after the prophet Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, there were no more prophets.

Let us now fast forward to the time of Jesus, about 400 years later. The time in between the Old and New Testaments has been referred to as the Intertestamental period. During that time the people felt that God had been silent since there were no prophets. That didn’t mean the people stopped longing for a prophet since they still expected that God would again speak to them through a prophet.

They were familiar with the Psalms and many of those psalms told of the glories of Israel – their power, their glory, their mighty deeds. Yet, in reality, they knew they were a conquered people – conquered by the kingdoms of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, Egypt, Seleucia, and Rome. The conclusion was inescapable – Israel had rebelled so ferociously and consistently that God gave them over to foreign powers. Through the Old Testament prophets, however, God promised that salvation would come someday.

For example in Deuteronomy, Moses prophesied regarding the future:

“God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.”

And a bit later he prophesied that whoever rejects the prophet, rejects God.

It can be safely said that the people of Palestine were waiting expectantly for a prophet. John the Baptist was just who they wanted to hear. Then, just a few years after John began preaching a

message of repentance and baptizing those who followed him, Jesus appeared on the scene. There were other, less known men, who also walked the countryside, as prophets and teachers. We can make note of the fact that John and Jesus were not the only ones – but the others have faded into obscurity.

Having prophets reappear after 400 years was exciting to the Jews – they felt something unusual was about to happen, and they were trying to figure out just what that something might be. John was especially fascinating; people were trying to figure him out. They wondered whether he was the Messiah – the One who would be sent to save them – or perhaps he was Elijah brought back from heaven, or maybe he was the Prophet that Moses had promised so many, many years before.

John denied that he was any of these but rather the forerunner – the one who was sent to prepare the way for the One he called Lord, the One he was unworthy to even carry his sandals. What we know of John was that he did bring God's word to the people, he warned them to repent, and he baptized his followers; but he rarely performed miracles. He did what he was called to do – prepare the way for Jesus.

So what about Jesus as Prophet? Did He align with the prophets of the Old Testament?
Yes – and no. Jesus did tell his listeners that:

“My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me.” (John 7:16).

Also in John Jesus said:

“For I do not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.” (John 12:45).

But Jesus also gave his listeners warnings – he warned them against following the Pharisees, he warned them to not fear those who might persecute them, even kill them, and he warned them not to be afraid.

And he certainly was a miracle worker. He turned water into the best wine, he brought a young girl, as well as his beloved friend Lazarus, back to life, he multiplied loaves and fish to feed thousands, he calmed the storm while crossing the Sea of Galilee, he cured the sick, brought sight to the blind, straightened withered limbs, healed lepers, cast out demons. Jesus was certainly a miracle worker.

But he was more, much more than an extension of the prophets of the Old Testament. When he returned to his hometown of Nazareth and read the scroll in the synagogue – the reading in Isaiah 61:1-2:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for He has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come.” (my emphasis)

Jesus finished the reading, rolled up the scroll and then declared,

“This Scripture has come true today before your very eyes.” (Luke 4:21)

This was Jesus' most public declaration that he was God's appointed agent – someone more than the prophets of old. He also, like the Old Testament prophets, focused on the coming of God's earthly reign –

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15).

Just what did Jesus mean when he talked about the kingdom of God? In broadest terms the kingdom of God is all about God’s reign over all creation. Jesus said, **“The kingdom of God is within you.”**

This statement has led some to feel that this kingdom of God is internal and spiritual only –that it’s the connection between God and humanity which allows us to pray and have relationship with God. It is that, but it is more than that.

This may give us a clearer understanding: the word usually translated “within” would be more appropriately translated as “among” – **the kingdom of God is among you.** How could that be the case then and now as well? The kingdom of God is one way of identifying God’s power as ruler – king – of all. Jesus was telling the people that God’s power was at hand and that God was beginning to exercise God’s rightful authority in a new way. What new way? Jesus. Jesus became incarnate, took on human form and lived among us. Through his words and deeds, Jesus was implying that the kingdom of God had already invaded the earth. In other words, Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven into our world.

This was a new concept at the time and it is still one that is hard for us to understand. When Jesus talked about the kingdom of God being near, Jesus was telling his listeners that he was God’s agent, that God had opened heaven and allowed Jesus to come to earth to interact with people, and tasked with the eventual duty of taking on our sins himself so that we could come before God as new creations.

So you might conclude that the kingdom of heaven is here – in its complete form. But there is more to understand. Jesus brought a glimpse of God’s kingdom. More will follow, either when we die and are in heaven or when Jesus comes again. Through the first coming of Jesus as Prophet we have been given a glimpse of heaven. You may have heard the phrase – already but not yet – the kingdom of God has come but it is not yet complete.

An analogy may be in order. Think of a couple who has just learned that they are to have a child. They anticipate the child’s arrival, they tell their family and friends the good news, they take classes, they prepare a nursery, they buy baby clothes and baby toys, they have chosen a name, they may even have seen the baby’s face on an ultrasound. They are all ready but the baby has not yet arrived. So it is with the kingdom of heaven, Jesus brought a glimpse of heaven to us by coming down from heaven, but there is more, much more waiting for us.

How can we, how should we, as Christians 2000 years later respond to Jesus’ message regarding the kingdom of God? I believe that our obligation is the same as it was then. As Jesus said, **“The kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the Good News.” (Mark 1:15)**

We, then, should wholeheartedly accept this Good News – that belief in Jesus will take away our guilt and sin and allow us entrance into life eternal. Repent and believe. Turn away from the things that separate us from God and turn completely toward God. That means trying to live our lives not for ourselves but for God. Live as obedient subjects of God in God’s kingdom. We show the world who

is in charge of our lives each time we serve at a community dinner, go on a mission trip, knit a prayer shawl, take food to a shut-in, visit the sick, send a card, or even by giving a smile to any and all we meet. In these ways we can celebrate the already and anticipate the not yet. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray. Holy, giving, and loving God, we thank You for sending Jesus as Prophet to us. Though Jesus You have given us a glimpse of Your kingdom that is to come. We ask Your help to acknowledge the ways we have fallen short. Help us to repent of those ways and fill our lives with those things that honor You. You are truly an awesome God. Amen.