

THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN (1)

The Role of the Prophet

A. Introduction

1. The work of Christ is the term that is used to describe all that Christ did when He came to earth to save us by dying on the cross, all that He is doing now having risen from the dead and ascended to God's right hand, and all that He will do when He returns.

There is a tendency, when we think about the work of Christ, to focus all our attention on His substitutionary death in the place of sinners.

Whilst "Christ and Him crucified" is at the heart of His saving work and vital to it, this is not the only thing He has done, is doing, or will do for us.

So, throughout church history Christians have spoken of Christ's work as a Prophet, as a Priest, and as a King.

"Prophet, priest and king is not the only way to talk about Christ, but it has to be one of the simplest and best." (Kevin DeYoung)

2. In the early church there were three aspects of Christ's work that were majored on.

Christ's life – His teaching and His example (or Christ as prophet).

Christ's death – as a sacrifice for sin (or Christ as priest).

Christ's resurrection – defeating sin, death and Satan (or Christ as King).

3. By the time of the Reformation, this Threefold Office of Christ (munus triplex), was the common way of understanding His saving work.

Heidelberg Catechism (Q31):

Q. Why is he called Christ, that is, Anointed?

A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of his body has redeemed us, and who continually intercedes for us before the Father; and our eternal King, who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in the redemption obtained for us.

1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith (Chapter 8 Of Christ the Mediator):

Paragraph 1. It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man; the prophet, priest, and king; head and saviour of the church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

Paragraph 9. This office of mediator between God and man is proper only to Christ, who is the prophet, priest, and king of the church of God; and may not be either in whole, or any part thereof, transferred from him to any other.

Paragraph 10. This number and order of offices is necessary; for in respect of our ignorance, we stand in need of his prophetic office; and in respect of our alienation from God, and imperfection of the best of our services, we need his priestly office to reconcile us and present us acceptable unto God; and in respect to our averseness and utter inability to return to God, and for our rescue and security from our spiritual adversaries, we need his kingly office to convince, subdue, draw, uphold, deliver, and preserve us to his heavenly kingdom.

4. Does it matter how the church in the past has understood the nature of Christ's work?

Isn't the more important question – what does the Bible say?

Yes but...

"Bible study torn asunder from the teaching of the historic Christian church is a recipe for deviation."
(Robert Letham)

What do the Scriptures teach?

"Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." (Revelation 1:5)

Christ is our Prophet to teach us.

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." (Hebrews 1:1-3)

Christ is our Priest to sacrifice to save us, intercede for us, and bless us.

"And he says in another place, "You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek." During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek." (Hebrews 5:6-10)

Christ is our King to rule over and guide us.

"For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet". Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:25-28)

The reason the church has spoken of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King is because that sums up well what God's Word teaches.

5. However, the roles of prophet, priest and king, not only are a helpful way of understanding the work of Christ, they are also a helpful way of understanding the life of a Christian.

Heidelberg Catechism (Q32):

Q. Why are you called a Christian?

A. Because I am a member of Christ by faith and thus share in his anointing, so that I may as prophet confess his name, as priest present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to him, and as king fight with a free and good conscience against sin and the devil in the life, and hereafter reign with him eternally over all creatures.

Christians imitate Christ in each of these roles, albeit in a lesser way.

"Remember this: The work of Christ and the life of a Christian can be summed up in three words – "prophet", "priest", and "king." (Kevin DeYoung)

6. To help us understand what the Bible teaches about the work of Christ and the life of the Christian as prophet, priest, and king, we're going to use some of the different theological tools which are at our disposal.

Exegetical Theology Tool: we use this tool when we study and seek to understand individual texts of the Bible.

Biblical Theology Tool: we use this tool when we trace how a theme develops and progresses through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Systematic Theology Tool: we use this tool when we sum up what the whole Bible teaches on a specific doctrine.

Pastoral (or Practical) Theology Tool: we use this tool when we apply what we learn to the life of the church and individual Christians.

B. What is a prophet?

1. A prophet is someone who speaks the words that God gives him to speak.

This role of the prophet is defined for us in a passage found in Deuteronomy 18.

It is part of a sermon that Moses preached to prepare the people of Israel for life in the Promised Land of Canaan.

“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no-one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God. The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so.” (Deuteronomy 18:9-14)

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire any more, or we will die.” The LORD said to me: “What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.” You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?” If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.” (Deuteronomy 18:15-22)

2. The background to this explanation of what a prophet is, is a warning that God gives to the people of Israel about the detestable practices of the nations that were living there.

Q. What were these practices?

Child sacrifice; divination or sorcery; interpreting omens; engaging in witchcraft; casting spells; and using mediums or spiritists who consult the dead.

Q. What do these practices have in common?

They were the means that the nations used to obtain information from their gods.

Q. What was Israel not to do?

Use any of these ways and means to receive information from their God.

Q. Why?

Because God will reveal to His people everything He wants them to know.

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” (Deuteronomy 29:29)

Q. How will God reveal this information?

3. It is through a prophet that God makes known His will and His ways to His people.

“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.” (Deuteronomy 18:18)

God gives His words to a prophet.

The prophet then gives God’s words to the people.

4. Israel already had in Moses one who spoke God’s word to them.

At Mount Sinai, the people asked Moses to meet with God for them.

“When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.” (Exodus 20:18-19)

God makes clear in Deuteronomy 18 that He approved of this arrangement.

“For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire any more, or we will die.” The LORD said to me: “What they say is good.” (Deuteronomy 18:16-17)

5. There were two potential problems.

The first is that the people do not listen to the prophet.

“If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.” (Deuteronomy 18:19)

The second is that the prophet does not speak God’s words.

“But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.” (Deuteronomy 18:20)

This second problem raises the question – “How do you know whether someone is a true prophet or a false prophet?”

“You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?” If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.” (Deuteronomy 18:21-22)

A prophet does not speak God’s words if what he says disagrees with something God has previously said or if what he says does not happen – to do this is devilish! (see Genesis 3:1-5)

C. Summary

1. The role of the prophet is to be one who speaks the words God gives to them.

Through the prophet, God reveals Himself and His will and ways to His people.

2. This wasn’t the only way God spoke to His people.

“When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He enquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.” (1 Samuel 28:5-6)

But it would become the primary way He does.