

THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN (2)

The Story of the Prophet

A. Introduction

1. The work of Christ is the term that is used to describe all Christ did when He came to earth to save us by dying on the cross, all that He is doing now that He has 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 central to it, this is not the only thing He has done, is doing, or will do, for us. Throughout church history Christians have spoken of Christ's work as a Prophet, as a Priest, and as a King, which sums up well what God's Word teaches.

"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. 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.

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)

3. 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.

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

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

Israel is told that they were not to use any of the ways and means the nations used to receive information from their God.

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

It is through a prophet that God makes Himself known, along with 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.

This was the primary way God spoke to His people.

B. The Story of the Prophet

1. If a prophet is someone who speaks the words that God gives him to speak, the first person to occupy this role was Adam.

God spoke to Adam.

"And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17)

And Adam passed on this command to Eve.

"The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" (Genesis 3:2-3)

While this command was not directly spoken by God to Eve, Eve can know and speak about it (although in this instance, falsely).

Two observations:

1) God created human beings to be prophets – to speak truthfully to others what they have been told about God from God.

2) Some people receive the truth about God directly from God while others receive it from those God originally spoke to.

2. After sin entered the world, Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden.

As a result, now all people would be no longer able to know God and speak about Him except that which has been revealed to them in creation.

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." (Romans 1:18-20)

That is, unless God graciously revealed Himself and His purposes to them – which He did.

Adam and Eve are given a promise about a Saviour which they passed on to their descendants.

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

"Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man [the God-man or the man-Jehovah]." (Genesis 4:1)

"At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD." (Genesis 4:26)

3. There were other men to whom God spoke and they in turn functioned as prophets.

Enoch.

"Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken about him." (Jude 14-15)

Noah.

"So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark..." (Genesis 6:13-14)

"...but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness..." (2 Peter 2:5)

Abraham.

"The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:1-3)

"After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision..." (Genesis 15:1)

"...for he is a prophet..." (Genesis 20:7)

Joseph.

"Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no-one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." (Genesis 41:15-16)

4. Adam, Noah, Abraham and others, as well as having a prophetic role, also had a priestly and kingly role too.

But with the establishment of Israel, these three roles became increasingly separate from each other.

Of the prophets of Israel, Moses was model prophet and the greatest.

"God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you.' This is my name for ever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites – a land flowing with milk and honey.'" (Exodus 3:14-17)

"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)

"Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses. Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt – to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no-one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel." (Deuteronomy 34:9-12)

However, this did not mean that there was no prophetic role for all of God's covenant people – those whom He was in relationship with.

"See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

As the nation's surrounding Israel were taught God's Law by them, they would fulfil a prophetic function.

Yet rather than drawing the nations to God, Israel was drawn to the gods of the nations.

Prophets were therefore needed, not only to speak God's words to the people, but also to call Israel back to their God and warn them of the judgment that would come if failed to do so.

"Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help. When the Israelites cried out to the LORD because of Midian, he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Ammorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me." (Judges 6:6-10)

5. There were though two problems with all the prophets God raised up for His people.

a) None of these prophets from Adam onwards were perfect.

Even the model prophet, Moses, was not able to enter the Promised Land.

b) None of these prophets from Adam onwards could change the hearts of the people so that they would fulfil the prophetic role they were created to have.

But these prophets do point us to a future prophet that was promised, who would not only speak God's words, but who would cause His people to as well.

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." (Deuteronomy 18:15)

"The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back." (Isaiah 50:4-5)

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God." (Isaiah 61:1-2)

"A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' assistant since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:27-29)

"And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." (Joel 2:28-32)

C. Summary

1. God created human beings to be prophets – to speak truthfully to others what they have been told about God from God.

Those who receive God's words directly are often referred to as "prophets".

Those who receive God's words indirectly (via a prophet) still have a prophetic role.

2. The Old Testament ends with the need for a future prophet who would speak God's Word and restore God's people to what they were meant to be.