

THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN (4)

The Prophetic Work of the Christian

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.

Throughout the history of the church, Christians have spoken of Christ's work in His roles 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. 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 them to speak.

"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 created all humans to be prophets – to speak truthfully to others what they had been told about God by God.

Adam was the first to occupy this role of prophet, passing on God's words to Eve.

Once sin entered the world, people were no longer able to know God and speak about Him unless God graciously revealed Himself and spoke to them – which He did.

With the establishment of the nation of Israel, the role of prophet was occupied by specific individuals.

This didn't mean that there was no 'prophetic' role for all of God's people.

Yet with Israel's failure to do this and be a light to the nations, and the inability of the Old Testament prophets to change their hearts so that they would perform this prophetic role they were meant to have, a future prophet was needed, who would not only speak God's words but who would cause God's 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)

5. God promised that this prophet would come, and in Jesus of Nazareth, He did.

Jesus' identity as a Prophet was announced by John the Baptist, confirmed by God the Father, and proven by His words and deeds.

But He was more than a prophet. He is the Word of God – the One through whom God makes Himself known.

Jesus' work as a Prophet was to reveal God to us and speak God's words to us.

Because without His prophetic work, we would be ignorant of God and unable to know Him and live a life that pleases Him.

6. Jesus does His work as Prophet, firstly, by making known the Father and by showing us the way to the Father.

He did this by His own personal preaching and teaching, and by His Word written.

After His ascension to heaven, Jesus continued to speak through His apostles and prophets.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers..." (Ephesians 4:11)

The apostles were those men who received and declared the truth about Jesus, and this truth they spoke was confirmed by the signs and wonders they did.

"But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26)

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come." (John 16:13)

The prophets were those who encouraged believers in local churches by speaking God's Word, either new revelations from God or by explaining and applying the apostle's teaching to that particular congregation.

"And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration and those speaking in different kinds of tongues." (1 Corinthians 12:28)

"Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no-one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified." (1 Corinthians 14:1-5)

Speaking in tongues appears to be prophesying in a different language. When this is interpreted or translated it become prophecy that teaches and encourages believers within a local church.

The truth about Jesus which the apostles and prophets proclaimed and taught has been preserved for us in the New Testament, and is the foundation upon which the church is built.

"...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." (Ephesians 2:20)

With the completion of God's Word, apostles and prophets were no longer needed.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Instead, the church has been given evangelists and pastor-teachers to guard God's Word, preach and teach it and entrust it to others who will do the same.

"What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." (2 Timothy 1:13-14)

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." (2 Timothy 2:2)

7. Jesus also, secondly, does His prophetic work by changing His people so they would speak God's words, restoring the prophetic role they were created to have.

"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." (Joel 2:28-32)

After ascending to heaven, He sent His Spirit to His people to enable them to know Him, and to empower them to speak the truth about Him.

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:1-4)

"No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel..." (Acts 2:16)

8. One day God's people will do this perfectly.

In the new heaven and new earth we will only know the truth about God fully.

"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:12)

"But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

In the new heaven and new earth we will only speak the truth about God.

"And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:10)

"After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." (Revelation 19:1-3)

9. What does this prophetic work in the life of Christians look like now that Spirit has been poured out on all God's people and God's Word is complete?

It is not the work of revelation, but of proclamation.

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...

B. The Prophetic Work of the Body of Christ

1. The church now has prophetic ministry in making disciples by faithfully proclaiming the gospel and calling people to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus, by baptising them, and by teaching them to obey everything He has commanded.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

The primary place where this happens is the gathering of the church to worship God on the Lord’s Day.

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25)

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.” (Ephesians 5:19)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:16)

2. To help the church in this task of making disciples, Jesus gives to the church leaders and teachers who preach God’s Word.

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13)

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.” (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

As God’s Word is preached, Jesus works by His Spirit in the life of the church equipping His followers so that they are built up in the faith.

C. The Prophetic Work of the Believer in Christ

1. The individual Christian now has a prophetic ministry too.

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:27)

“I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.” (Acts 2:17-18)

“As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him.” (1 John 2:27)

2. We are to faithfully understand the Word of God.

"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (Luke 11:28)

"But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." (Psalm 1:2)

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11)

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22)

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they receive the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11)

3. We are to faithfully use the Word of God.

In the home.

"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6:5-7)

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4)

In the church.

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." (Ephesians 4:15)

"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (Hebrews 3:13)

In the community.

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15)

"Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." (Colossians 4:5-6)