



*“THE BIBLE: PROPHETS”

Biblical Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

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*[Open Bible: *“I hate your festivals and despise your solemn assemblies. I take no delight in the noise of your songs and harps.”*] Not exactly a gentle start to a message, is it? But that’s the prophets for you! Never the words we want to hear, or find it easy to hear! **But always the Word of the Living God, the one we need to hear!**

And we don’t like it! Whatever our politics may be, we prefer to surround ourselves as 2 Timothy 4:3 warns us, with people who will *“tell us whatever our itching ears want to hear.”*¹ It was true *750 years before the birth of Jesus when Amos spoke those words for God. And it’s still true today. But Amos continued. *“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”*²

So, welcome to the second section of the Old Testament in our series on the Bible. Last week we looked at the Law, the first five books of the Bible. * This week - the Prophets - next Sunday, the Writings. All of it is part of my challenge to spend fifteen minutes a day reading the Bible. **(If you haven’t started it’s not too late – just saying!)*

Someone asked me, since we are Christians, why we’re studying the Old Testament. I thought I would share my answer to them with you this morning. *Christians (*since Marcion in the 2nd century*) have often assumed that the Old Testament somehow no longer applies to us, since Jesus came. **Nothing could be further from the truth.**

We need to recall Jesus’ words from Matthew 5:17 - *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”* Jesus, the Son of God, saw his ministry as based on what we know as Old Testament.

Listen to Matthew 22:37-40, on which we based our Church purpose statement: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and.’ This is the first commandment. *And the second is like it. ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

Jesus, the disciples, and the Apostle Paul were all faithful Jews who were deeply committed to Holy Scripture, our Old Testament. And Jesus own preaching stood firmly in the Prophetic tradition. After his first sermon in Luke 4, Jesus said, *“I tell you the truth, a prophet is not without honor except in his own country.”* (Luke 4:24)

¹ II Timothy 4:3 NLT: *“For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear.”*

² The opening Scripture and this verse are paraphrased from Amos 5:21-24 by the author.

The part of the Old Testament that our Hebrew ancestors called **“The Prophets”* included the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, which they called *“The Former Prophets”* and then the books called *“The Latter Prophets”* which includes **Jeremiah, *Ezekiel, *Daniel and *Isaiah*, plus twelve shorter prophetic books sometimes clustered together in a scroll that’s simply known as **“The Book of the Twelve”* - *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*. If you didn’t catch all those, it’s OK!

They tried to teach me the **names of the Major and Minor Prophets** in Sunday School as a kid, but I didn’t have any better luck remembering them than I did the ten commandments. **Fortunately, most Bibles list them all, inside the front cover!*

The thing to remember about the Prophets is - though the message was often harsh – their purpose was always to call people to return to a relationship with God - **the same overarching purpose of the entire Bible. Their purpose was never to *“fore-tell” the future but to “tell forth” the Word of God! People get that wrong a lot.*

The prophets wrote from the 8th through 5th century B.C. during the time of the **Divided Kingdoms* from the invasion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. then to and during the exile to Babylon of the Southern Kingdom of Judah in 587 B.C. **Their message was a warning, and then a reminder to never give up hope in God.**

What I find most remarkable is that, as the Bible tells their story, they were ordinary people who became willing to put their lives completely in God’s hands! ***They were ordinary people who took God’s Word to them seriously!**

Surely they must have thought as most of us have - *“I’m not holy enough, special enough, gifted enough that God could use me.” “I’m too young, too old, too poor, too busy, too something to answer God’s call to make a difference in this world.”*

But listen to the Biblical witness from the Law and the Prophets...

- When God called, Moses said - *“Lord, I am slow of speech...”*
- When God called, Elijah said - *“I am the only one left who believes in you.”*
- When God Called, Amos said - *“I am no prophet or prophet’s son...”*
- When God called, Jeremiah said - *“O Lord, I am only a youth...”*
- And when God called, Isaiah said - *“Depart from me, Lord, I am a sinful man...”*

You’ll recall his story from our text this morning. As you open your Bibles, notice the unusual way that the text begins. **“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his garment filled the Temple.”* It was the year 642 B.C. - the year King Uzziah died. It is one of the few times in the Bible we can pinpoint to an exact date and place.

It was a hard time. The Northern Kingdom invaded by Assyria and enslaved. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, was spared only because King Uzziah had traded protection and prosperity for turning his people away from God.³

No wonder Isaiah cried, **“Woe unto me! I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the LORD Almighty.”*⁴

No wonder he fell on his face in the temple, in despair. The foundations of the Temple and his life were shaking apart! But Walter Brueggemann says there was no comfort. **“There is no cheap grace here, no easy word of blessing for those who drop by, counting on a quick and comfortable deal with the Almighty.”*⁵

But God wasn't finished with Isaiah. He became the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, the voice of hope, pointing to Messiah that would deliver his people.

Once they have been forgiven and healed by God's grace - ordinary people with ordinary abilities can do extraordinary things! Another way of saying it is this, if God could take ordinary people once to make a difference, God can do it again.

Long ago Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, **“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”* With lips still trembling he said, **“Here I am. Send me!”*⁶

The voice of God is still calling today... I wonder who is answering? Not politicians, with too many easy promises, and dishonest intent. Not the ones whom we cheer as “prophetic” because they champion causes in which we already believe.

I wonder if maybe, just maybe, God is calling you... or speaking to your heart...

Whom shall I call to return to me, in my grace, and then base their lives on my Word?
Whom shall I send to tell the truth when people don't want to hear?

Whom shall I send to help me take the message of Christ to those who turn away?

Whom shall I send to call my people to vote by what is right and not most profitable?

Whom shall I send to call for a higher standard of justice by living faithfully each day?

Whom shall I send to build bridges of reconciliation and not higher and higher walls?

Oh Lord, God help us say... ***“Here I am. Send me!”***

³ John Bright in *A History of Israel*, 3rd edition, Westminster Press, Copyright ©1981.

⁴ Isaiah 6: 1-8, *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. © 1996, 1984. Zondervan: Grand Rapids

⁵ *Isaiah* (Westminster Bible Companion) by Walter Brueggemann. Copyright © 1998, John Knox Press.

⁶ Op Cit. New International Version. Isaiah 6:1-8.