

# Session 2: The Need for Messengers with a Prophetic Perspective

## I. INTRODUCTION

- A. We desperately need messengers sent from the presence of God for the sake of the nation and the sake of the people. These messengers can take a number of different expressions and speak into a number of different contexts. For example, there are messengers who proclaim publicly and messengers who train children in the context of their own home. There is a deep need for authentic messengers in every realm of society.
- B. We need vessels who carry the Word of the Lord with authority:
- <sup>10</sup>“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup>so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11 ESV)*
1. We need fresh clarity on the Word of God. His Word is sent forth with a purpose. We need to understand His purposes. We tend to assume that our purposes are His purposes and then we fit His Word to our agendas.
  2. God’s word will succeed in the thing “for which He sent it.” His Word is not something we can leverage for our own agendas, hopes, dreams, and fears.
- C. We need fresh confidence in the Word of God. We tend to lack full confidence in the Word of God. This expresses itself in different ways.
1. One way is that we completely disregard what the Word of says. We reject the constraints of the Word. This is the primary sin of our culture and it manifest itself as open rebellion.
  2. The other way we lack confidence in the Word is that we take the Word of God and use it as a support for our own hopes and desires without soberly weighing everything the Word of God says.
    - a. This is a common sin in the church and it manifests itself in mixture and a lack of sobriety.

- b. This was the sin that led to the fall of Israel. Israel had partial confidence in the Word of God. Israel interpreted the Scripture through a human lens that ended up neglecting the full implications of the Word of God and it was fatal.
- 3. We have a tendency to neglect the implications of the Word of God in some measure, and when we do it causes us to live in a way that is not sober. Ultimately, we become committed to what He is not committed to and not committed to what he is committed to.

## II. THE NEED FOR A PROPHETIC PERSPECTIVE

- A. To be messengers, we must have a prophetic perspective, and there are several keys to this perspective. One key to having a prophetic perspective is recognizing the ability to discern the tension in God's sovereignty over the nations.
  - 1. We need a revelation of both God's sovereignty and man's rebellion in order to have a prophetic perspective of what God is doing in the nations. We tend towards partiality where we exaggerate the sins of some and ignore the sins of others. *We are especially prone to doing this when we have a nationalistic perspective.* It produces what the Bible cautions against, the sin of partiality where we evaluate nations according to different standards and it clouds the prophetic perspective.
  - 2. God confronted the prophet Habakkuk in Habakkuk 1 by telling Habakkuk that He was the one raising up Babylon, a nation that He described as a proud and wicked nation. This did not mean God was overlooking Babylon's sin, but it did mean God was sovereignly involved in Habakkuk's situation in a very different way that Habakkuk had assumed. God's sovereignty over history creates a tension that we must bear to be truly prophetic. We see this especially in God's dealing with Israel. God uses both positive and negative dynamics to bring forth His purposes for Israel, and He does the same with the nations.

- B. A prophetic perspective also requires being anchored in the return of Jesus as the lens through which we view events in our generation.

<sup>10</sup>*Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. (Revelation 19:10 ESV)*

1. The testimony of Jesus is ultimately the witness of who He is and what He will do. The climax of that testimony is His return and that return is the foundation of prophecy.
  2. This is so important to Jesus, that one of the major functions of the Holy Spirit in the church is to declare to us the things that must come. The Spirit gives us clarity on the return of Jesus so that we can be a prophetic people.  
*<sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:13 ESV)*
  3. This does not mean that every single detail of prophecy must be understood to be a messenger, but if we are not anchored in the return of the Lord it puts a limit on our ability to prophesy to our nations.
  4. It is not a matter of predicting the return of the Lord, or only recognizing signs of the times, it is an issue of perspective. The biblical prophets prophesied to ancient situations, but their prophecies were anchored in the return of the Lord.
  5. Without this anchor, we become vulnerable to the trends of our generation and the nationalistic hopes and dreams of the people. The result is that we put our hope in false hopes and expend energy on things that are not valuable.
- C. Isaiah's encounter in Isaiah 6 forms the basis of what it means to have a prophetic perspective:  
*<sup>1</sup>In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" <sup>4</sup>And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup>And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:1-5 ESV)*
- D. Isaiah's fascination with Uzziah made his lips unclean and clouded his perspective. So far as we indulge the fantasy of a human deliverer our lips are unclean and as long as we expect solutions in human kings, it will limit our prophetic perspective and hinder our ability to prophesy.

- E. Isaiah's encounter is a warning to us that God will ultimately shatter all our idols. He will expose their weakness and bring them down. God would not tolerate Israel's idols even though Israel had a unique covenant with God and He had put His name on the nation. He will do the same with the idols of the nations of the earth.
- F. It was only when Uzziah died that Isaiah began to see clearly. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah most likely saw Jesus in His millennial glory. A vision of Jesus in His glory is required to put everything else in perspective. This is why, after Isaiah 6, the book of Isaiah opens up and Isaiah is given repeated prophecies of the glory of Jesus.
- G. Uzziah's ultimate failure was when he decided as a king to act like a priest. We must beware of kings to try to take on the priesthood. This is emphasized in Isaiah's vision because Uzziah's death was a result of trying to take on a priestly role that was not his. Instead of Uzziah, Isaiah's saw a king who is a priest. This King was sitting in the temple. God's message to Isaiah was clear - only one man is capable of bearing the priesthood and carrying the hopes of the nation.
- H. This perspective is particularly challenging in a nation with a Christian culture and is especially challenging in the situation America finds itself in right now.
1. We should celebrate and recognize the sovereign hand of God in response to intercession when wise decisions are made in agreement with God's heart. We should be grateful for righteous decisions and grateful for freedom to proclaim the gospel.
  2. We also have to recognize the dangers that cultural Christianity poses for the apostolic gospel. Cultural Christianity poses a serious danger to the church when political powerbrokers who do not demonstrate a life in agreement with the values of the gospel begin to be celebrated as champions for the faith.
  3. Paul instructs us to distance ourselves from men and women who claim to be believers but reject the lifestyle of the believer (1 Corinthians 5:9-13). We must do this for the sake of the person's own soul and the witness of the church. Most of the church recognizes when a political leader is not truly a believer, but we fail to speak boldly about it when that person is claiming to be a Christian. We must soberly ask if we are too hesitant to do this out of a fear of losing political power.
  4. Sadly, we tend to do the opposite and distance ourselves from the world and tolerate men and women who claim Christianity but do not demonstrate a commitment to its values.

5. Our partiality, political and otherwise, keeps us from both discerning the work of God and recognizing the threats this can pose to the gospel.

### III. THE CURRENT CRISIS

- A. The current political situation in the nation will bring both blessing and challenges. We do not yet know what the future holds.
- B. It is possible we may see a delay in a global convergence of the nations that could accelerate wickedness in the nations. The Lord released division at the Tower of Babel to frustrate the nations in their unified intentions, but that division did eliminate the unrighteousness present in the divided nations.
- C. If we see such a delay we must see it as a window of mercy to prepare the church for a massive storm that is coming. The storm has not, and will not, be averted. When generations have experienced a delay before an impending storm they almost always interpreted that delay with presumption and squandered the opportunity to prepare the people for what was coming. We must interpret delays in global crisis as windows of opportunity to prepare the church.
- D. We will also see a rise in overt nationalism that creates fresh challenges for the church. The Lord is going to use these challenges to sharpen the discernment of the church. Confusion and competing loyalties will challenge the people of God and there will be an increasing need for clarity and a biblical perspective.

### IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR SPEECH

- A. We need pure lips. We need to get above fleshly narratives. We need to soberly ask ourselves how much we are influenced by the Word of God compared with our political allegiances and cultural narratives. Are we truly considering the full counsel of God?
- B. Isaiah's lips were unclean because he had participated in the political rhetoric of his nation rather than letting the word of God consume his perspective.
- C. We have a tendency in our culture to rush to speak. We think nothing of giving opinions and commenting even on things we know very little about.
  1. We rush to give opinions rather than waiting to hear what He is saying. Instead We need to learn to be still before Him until He speaks.

2. We need to be able to bear the discomfort of not having an answer until He speaks. Habakkuk assumed he knew the mind of the Lord, but once he waited on the Lord he was shocked by the Lord's response (Habakkuk 2:1).
- D. As a church we must ask, is our speech contributing to the storm in our nation or rebuking it?

## **V. MESSENGERS WHO OVERCOME THE THREAT OF NATIONALISM**

- A. We must be careful of over identification with political ideologies. We cannot be satisfied with political answers to what are ultimately spiritual issues.
- B. Here are three ways to guard our hearts from nationalism:
1. Remember that the church is God's highest priority. He will do whatever it takes to produce a mature church and He will ultimately destroy everything that hinders that. He uses nations to produce a mature church - he does not use the church to produce mature nations.
  2. Soak ourselves in the Word of God, particularly by praying the Word of God. Praying the Word of God brings our hopes and expectations into alignment with God's. We need to pray the whole counsel of God and not use the Word of God as fuel for our own desires.
  3. We must be fully convinced of God's full sovereignty over human history. This is our ultimate comfort, but can also be a tremendous challenge when He begins to direct history, or even our own lives, in a way that we did not expect.
- C. God declares His sovereignty over history and does not apologize for it even when it completely goes beyond what seems to be reasonable to us. He challenged Job with His sovereignty and then never gave Job reasons for his suffering. He challenged Habakkuk on Habakkuk's assumption about Israel and Babylon (Habakkuk 1).
- D. We must remember that God can build His church in any context. He has used the freedom of the western world to propagate the gospel and He used the oppression of China to produce a mature church. He is always advancing His church.
- E. Nationalism has been one of Israel's greatest challenges throughout her history and the church must overcome nationalism in order to be the witness we are called to be to Israel.

## **VI. GOD'S PROTOTYPE FOR A MESSENGER**

- A. Among all the messengers in the Bible, Jesus uniquely highlighted John the Baptist. He is perhaps the more important prototype for a messenger. In his life we find the core value system of a messenger. In the same way that the Bible highlights the apostle Paul as the model apostle, John is the model messenger.
1. John's birth was announced by Gabriel. Gabriel only announces two births in history - Jesus' and John. This tells us how important John is.
  2. Jesus said now one was greater than John (Matthew 11:11). This included Moses, David, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Abraham, etc. Jesus' evaluation of John also emphasizes how significant John is.
- B. John the Baptist brought an end time message in his generation and prepared the people for the visitation of God in their generation. The visitation in John's generation ended up not being the end-time drama John expected, but John's prophetic perspective prepared the people for the visitation they experienced.

## **VII. KEY LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST**

- A. John's entire life was priestly. His parents were priestly. His birth was predicted when his father is doing temple service. In fact, it was the one time in his life his father had that opportunity. John was a priest in the desert. He was not a strange hermit. He was a focused man who encountered the presence of God and ministered to God in the same way that David ministered to the Lord when he was a shepherd in the wilderness.
- B. God frequently uses barrenness when He needs a deliverer. This includes Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth.
- C. John Ministered to the Lord in the wilderness.
1. There are two kinds of deserts: the desert of testing and the desert of communion. John lived in the desert of communion. His goal was not to get out of the desert because his primary call was the desert. It is the place he discovered God. Some of you are born for what may seem like the desert. You do not manufacture a desert, you simply enter it when the Lord invites you into it.
  2. A preparation ministry requires deep preparation. John discovered that if you want to burn you have to purchase your own oil.

3. The desert is the place where God pulls you away from competing distractions so that you can be completely His. God's jealousy will cause Him to remove everything that competes with Him. *He will not share you.*
  4. Just as stars are more brilliant when you get away from competing lights, so also God becomes more brilliant when you enter the desert.
  5. John was on fire before the Lord as a priest in the desert.
  6. John's life demonstrates that the preparation of the messenger is the most important part of the messenger.
- D. John was not isolated. He had a group of young men he was discipling. Frequently we are kept from our destiny by refusing to embrace the small things. John was faithful in the small things.
- E. John fed himself on the Word of God which is why his sermon material was the Word of God. His sermon fragments are quotations of Isaiah and Malachi. His sermons reveal he fed himself on the beauty of Jesus (Isaiah) and the priesthood (Malachi).
1. The prophetic perspective requires deep knowledge of the Word of God. This is true even of the Old Testament prophets who spoke to their generation out of a foundation based on the Word of God.
  2. Their prophetic oracles were both divinely given and built on the foundation of the Old Testament law. We must recover the foundation of the Word of God to be able to prophesy.
- F. The Word of the Lord came to John in the wilderness. God knows where you are. He has not forgotten you or lost sight of you. *Crowds are seducing but the desert is where the burning bush appears and God speaks.*
- G. John did not bring a new message. John shook the nation by quoting Bible verses that everyone was familiar with. He quoted verses that people heard regularly read in the synagogue, but when he spoke them people said, "what should we do?" John did not do any signs or miracles. It was the sheer weight of his words that struck the people.
- H. John never left the wilderness until he went to jail. When the Word of God came to him he preached from his place of communion. 30 years prepared John for 6 months, but that 6 months is not what John lived for. John was burning before God as a desert priest his entire life.

1. He did not pay a 30-year price for a powerful ministry. He stood before God his entire life and this was his main source of pleasure.
  2. God did not think it was extravagant for John to spend most of his life in hiddenness ministering to God. God is not efficient in the way we are efficient. He builds messengers differently according to His own process.
  3. God has His ways of preparing His messengers. You become a voice by taking on his yoke, not by trying to be a voice.
  4. It does not bother God to take 30 years to build a messenger like John because He will enjoy John for all eternity.
- I. John saw himself as a "Friend of the Bridegroom." He understood that his ministry to the nation was essentially serving another man's wife. He came to the place where his chief joy was in God getting His reward. God's pleasure was enough for John.
  - J. John's entire life led up to one moment: Jesus' baptism. John set a stage where the Spirit could fall on Jesus and shift Him into His public ministry. John lived to set a stage for the Father to speak over His Son Jesus. This was the pinnacle of John's ministry – from this point onward everything faded.
  - K. John was willing to face so that Jesus could get the glory. John's anointing was so profound that it had to be laid aside so that it would not compete with Jesus' glory. The staggering thing is that John was ok with this.
  - L. *John gave his life to focused preparation and was one of the only people on the earth with any clarity about who Jesus was. Nevertheless, Jesus instead chose 12 other men to walk with Him. Men who did not have the clarity John had. John was not given a place on Jesus' team nor invited to join Jesus in my public ministry. Instead John ended up in jail and was executed on the whim of a wicked ruler. In fact, John spent more time in jail than he did in public preaching. John set the stage for Jesus and then willingly faded so that Jesus could receive His glory. John surrendered his calling for the sake of Jesus' calling. This is the forerunner ministry.*

## **VIII. TWO STEPS TO BECOMING A MESSENGER**

- A. To become a messenger, you must first get up above the storm in the place of intercession and ask God for His perspective.

- B. Give yourself to the knowledge of God from the Word of God. Ancient prophets prophesied out of a biblical context. They prophesied out of the law and the covenants. The Word of God was the foundation for their perspective.
1. End-time prophets will be called to do the same.
  2. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit in part to give us divine understanding of what the Word of God says will come (John 16:13).
  3. We are called first of all to be spokesmen for the Word of God.
- C. We need the divine grace of God on us to enable us to sit before God so that He can do His work and transform us into messengers. The world sits in darkness and in desperate need of messengers with clarity on the Word of God.

#### **IX. FOR FURTHER STUDY**

- A. <http://samuelwhitefield.com/1746/john-the-baptist-the-one-jesus-called-the-greatest>
- B. <http://samuelwhitefield.com/category/04-series/the-life-and-ministry-of-john-the-baptist>