

ORDINARY HEROES

The Prophets

I am not sure what memories you have of the Rugby World cup only a few weeks ago?

I expect I have already lost some of you who are not interested in Rugby, for others, we are living in the hope that next time our team will win and lift the world cup, and there are some here who still live with the hope that QPR might win the Premier league one day.

We all live our lives, with some hope in our hearts.

The lasting memory for me was when the South African Captain kissed his sweat band on his wrist, which had a cross on it and at the end of the match he knelt and prayed, we don't know what was said, but in front of millions around the Globe he gave glory to his God.

And I wonder- Was he a modern-day Prophet?

In the post-match interview, he hoped that this win would unite the nation of South Africa and inspire a new generation, and that whatever their lives and backgrounds, they could have hope for a better future.

What are we hoping for this morning? What inspires you to keep going?

Maybe the reality is there is nothing, we are just sat here going through the motions and that's ok.

We are going to be looking at Isaiah 9 v 1-7 from the book of Isaiah, a Prophet, an ordinary hero, who trusted in God and his Word.

The life of Barnabas may appear to have been very different from that of Isaiah and that of ours but we all have the same purpose in life - that of making God known to the generation we live amongst.

One gave hope to the nation of Israel and the world, Barnabas, the early church. The rugby captain wanted to unite his nation. And perhaps our call is to unite a family, or this broken town of Crawley.

We all have that same purpose today, to live a life reflecting Gods love and sacrifice. Nothing would happen in church if people did not make sacrifices of time and money.

So, I wonder if any of us would describe ourselves as prophets?

In the old testament you have 5 major (Isaiah, Ezekiel etc) and 12 minor prophets (Joel, Amos). The difference being the length of the book. Prophets were also known as Seers because they could see spiritual things, as God gave them insight.

You have other distinctions with prophets such as Isaiah, Daniel, Amos and Malachi, none of them were writing prophets such as Gad, Nathan and Elijah and even some unnamed prophets. You had female prophets such as Miriam and Deborah. Each used by God for a specific place and time.

Isaiah was given a vision of Glory (chapter 6) before being anointed for his prophetic work. In the Old Testament, the Holy spirit would rest upon certain people to enable them to share Gods truth. A prophet was used by God to communicate His message to the world.

Prophets under Gods gifting foretold the future, Joseph predicted seven years of plenty and seven years of famine.

I wonder today, has the Prophetic gift been given a bad reputation, can we trust what has been said? Modern day prophets can fill whole stadiums and people can travel thousands of miles to hear a special message from God but What are people searching for?

I wonder how our modern- day Prophets compare to the Old Testament ones?

An Old Testament prophet often led a hard life. Isaiah was sent to a people and was told “Ever hearing, but never understanding” (Isaiah 6:9) and, according to tradition, Isaiah was eventually murdered for his efforts.

Who would have chosen to be John the Baptist?

“ Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 25 What

then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in king's courts. 26 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' 28 I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

As a prophet, John's reward was to lose his head. The Old Testament Prophets were the everyday hero's of their day, faithfully following God and speaking his truth, bringing Gods light into the darkness.

But I wonder how many of them felt like it at the time? I wonder how many would have imagined over 2000 years later, people would still be reading their words and studying their lives.

However great the Prophets were, Jesus said the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John. Even in our weakness and mess Jesus reminds us of our true place in the kingdom of God. We may not feel like we are doing great for God and we never know what he can do through each of us.

Isaiah 9 begins :

"Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future, he will honour Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

2 The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned"

Today you could start this passage "Despite Brexit, our troubles, there will be no more gloom.

I am not sure what this must have been like to have been truly humbled by God. But what happened to Zebulun and Naphtali, I can only imagine how bad it was. Ian reminded us last week 'Everything is broken', and it was for them.

But the reality is the greater the darkness the brighter the light appears.

In the midst of darkness there is still hope, we have looked at Barnabas over the last few weeks, named him, Son of Encouragement, and I would suggest he was also the Son of Hope; encouragement brings hope.

We can all encourage one another, as we encourage each other, we are stronger together.

Isaiah writes here as if the event has already happened, those in darkness have seen a great light in Isaiah's mind and experience, what God had revealed would happen and was a sure foundation for his hope, and we live in the knowledge of that light.

The passage goes on and says

You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.

⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.

⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.

Isaiah reminds the people of Gideon's great victory over Midian to encourage the people. Isaiah foretells a time of peace, where boots used in battle will be destined for the fire.

He predicts the Messiah's birth, a new age and a new kingdom. Which is why we pray: Thy kingdom come, in the Lord's prayer, we want this new kingdom to be fully realised.

Messiah just means anointed one, a king in the Old Testament would be anointed as king and would be a messiah - but one of many - but Jesus rather than being just another king in the line of David, Jesus is the final Messiah, and the Greek word Christ simply means Messiah.

Verse 6 & 7 are familiar words that we read at this time of year, in preparation for Christmas and they build the foundation for Jesus ministry and kingdom on earth.

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

Its important to note that a child is born, a son was given. The word "son" is the title used for a king in the Old Testament. Jesus did not just appear but was born, given as a son born in human likeness and frailty, into the house of David. Yet descended from heaven.

We have the privilege of knowing, like Isaiah, that Jesus the Messiah lived, but like Isaiah we have not yet seen the fulfilment of this whole prophecy, until Christ the king comes again.

Are we looking forward to that day? When the Government will be on his shoulders?

We are going to look a bit further into the name given to the Son and I wonder what names / labels we have been given in the past? Should we rather hold onto the names God has given us as a child of God?

Jesus is given a name Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

These really should be read as one name - in the days of Isaiah kings often gave themselves long and grand names

One king named himself: Mighty Bull, One Capable of Planning, Great in Wonders, Filled with Truth, Son of Re to whom life is given.”

Kings of the day only hoped to fulfil these names, Isaiah knew that he was The Messiah, the son of God and would fulfil them.

What names have we been given?

“Wonderful” is a word that primarily describes the LORD, or extraordinary, or supernatural. In the Scriptures; it means “extraordinary, surpassing, marvellous, wonderful.”

David, meditating on the knowledge of the LORD, came to realize that the LORD knew everything about him, his thoughts, his intentions, even the words he was trying to say, all of it! (Ps. 139:1-6). He marvels, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me!”

The word wonderful was to ascribe the supernatural ability, and we can read how Jesus fulfilled this in the New Testament.

Counsellor – means one who plans, given the wisdom to rule.

Isaiah 11 v2

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord

His insight was supernatural—In John 1:48-51 He rightly analysed Nathanael; He said, “I saw you while you were under the fig tree before Philip called you.” To which Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.”

He recognized the Messiah refers to the Son as Mighty God. This refers not only to, God with us, Emmanuel God, the Son will be the image of God he will be known as the Powerful One the Mighty One, and that he will come again one day.

Jesus in John 8 v 58 says

Jesus identified Himself as the great I AM of the Old Testament, the Sovereign, Lord God of Israel. In Matthew 24:30 he announced, "All power is given to me. I AM—all power and humility."

The Everlasting Father refers himself as being the Father of Ages. It is implied that the Messiah will reign forever, and the Father would come in the form of the Son.

John 5 v 23

I came in my Father's names,

John 10 :30

I and the father are one. If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.

And finally, the Prince of Peace,

John 14v 17

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

In this troubled and often painful world we need God's peace in our lives, in Isaiah's time they wanted relief from the oppression they were under.

However, Jesus never promised a problem free life, Jesus said: "In this life you will have trouble and persecution."

But Jesus did promise to be with us through them!

Paul writes in Romans 15

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit".

And Jesus ultimately brought peace between us and God by His death and resurrection.

But what peace did Isaiah Prophecy? If we don't know peace in our world today?

It helped me when I heard another description of peace as - Shalom - and in its fuller context it can mean: completeness, wholeness, not just peace but fullness, complete wellbeing.

The peace Isaiah prophesied will only come to pass when Jesus comes again, Isaiah was looking forward to a time when there will be a new heaven and earth when Jesus will be fully known. And that will eventually bring total peace through His exalted reign over all the earth.

And the zeal of the Lord will achieve this. God's passion for us will achieve many things, our job is to hang on to his promises in the good and the difficult times and be God's Prophets on earth.

Preached at Crawley Baptist Church, on Sunday 24th November 2019, by Ian Larkham