

Week 33: *The Four Offices: Prophet*

Hook



Main Point: Jesus, being the Word made flesh, is God’s ultimate spokesperson.

Since the early 1960s, Ronald McDonald was the face of McDonalds; he appeared in television commercials, print ads, animated specials, he even was the start of a comic book. However, as time progressed, circuses and carnivals faded from the American zeitgeist and clowns began to evoke unsettling connotations of fear and danger; horror movies latched on to the idea and several featured clowns as antagonists. Additionally, in the early 2010s, the link between childhood obesity and fast food was widely publicized, and McDonalds garnered criticism over a character such as Ronald that was clearly aimed at children. The nail in the coffin for Ronald McDonald arrived in 2016 as a series of “creepy clown sightings” emerged across the United States. People dressed as clowns (sometimes armed) appeared across the country, further tarnishing the image of once beloved childhood icons. Ronald McDonald was officially retired that same year.¹

Ronald was replaced by a series of celebrities; these new spokespeople often came with massive price tags:

Justin Timberlake: \$6 million

Kobe Bryant: \$10 million

Lebron James: \$4 million

Heidi Klum: \$19 million²

Q: If you had to replace Ronald McDonald with a celebrity spokesperson, who would it be?

Q: If you had to choose a celebrity to be a spokesperson for you or your family, to accurately speak for you, who would it be?

Transition: Today's lesson will examine God's mouthpieces in 1 and 2 Samuel: the prophets. We will discuss their role, the shortcomings of those who held the office, and in what ways Jesus is the perfect prophet.

RECAP: In the last lesson, we saw that the failure of the judges and kings to do justice and judge God's people justly points us ahead to Christ as the only true judge. This week, we'll look at the role of prophet in the Old Testament and how Jesus is the ultimate prophet whom God promised from the beginning.

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Numbers 12:6–8; Deuteronomy 13:1–5 and 18:22; 1 Samuel 3:1–21 and 9:9 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Prophets are God's messengers to His people.

Q: Why was Samuel afraid to tell Eli God's message?

Q: How does Deuteronomy tell us we can know if someone is a false prophet?

In the last lesson, we saw that in the theocracy, Moses was the prophet and judge, along with the elders he appointed; Aaron was the priest, and God was the king. But during the time of the judges, most of Israel's leaders were only judges, not prophets. But Samuel, Israel's final judge prior to the monarchy served as judge, prophet and priest, and God was Israel's king. When the people asked for a human king, those roles were separated because the king needed a priest to mediate worship and a prophet other than himself to hold him accountable when he was going astray.

In 1 and 2 Samuel, we see three main prophets to the king of Israel – Samuel, Nathan and Gad, who did not serve sequentially; their ministries overlapped. There were also groups of other prophets, and even Saul prophesied when the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, but only temporarily (1 Samuel 10:10–12). Later, when David first fled from Saul to Samuel at Ramah, Saul sent messengers to bring David back, but the Spirit overcame them, and they prophesied with Samuel and the prophets with him instead. This happened three times, until Saul himself went to take David, and the Spirit also came upon him, and he prophesied as well, again temporarily (1 Samuel 19:18–24).

In 1 Samuel 9:9, a parenthetical statement tells us that in earlier times in Israel, the people called a prophet a "seer," a Hebrew word that means "vision." The use of "seer" is confusing because it is used in the Old Testament only in this instance. A word related to "seer" is only used after this – in Samuel, Kings, Chronicles and a few of the prophets (Isaiah, Amos, Micah). But the word "prophet" (spokesperson) is used in all the books leading up to Samuel (except Joshua), about Abraham, Miriam, Moses and Deborah (Genesis 20:7; Exodus 15:20; Deuteronomy 18:15; Judges 4:4). We get a little enlightenment about this terminology from what God told Miriam and Aaron about Moses. God said a prophet typically heard from the Lord in visions or dreams (which explains "seer"), but with Moses, God spoke "mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles" (Numbers 12:6–8). God's law describes "prophets" as hearing from the Lord in dreams or visions (Deuteronomy 13:1–5). Samuel described his calling as a "vision," though using a different word (1 Samuel 3:15). Also, the story opens with "the word of

the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision,” implying that dreams and visions were how prophets typically heard from the Lord (1 Samuel 3:1).

Either way, whether hearing from the Lord in a vision or hearing His voice directly, a “prophet” was considered a spokesperson for God. The prophet’s role was to hear God’s Word and communicate it to His people. The book of 1 Samuel opens by telling us that the Word of the Lord was rare in the days before He called Samuel. After more than 400 years of the downward spiral of idolatry and disobedience in Judges, God hadn’t spoken to His people for a while. But a “man of God” came to the high priest Eli and pronounced judgment on his house, which God repeated to Samuel when He called him as a prophet (1 Samuel 2:27–36; 3:10-14). And God continued to speak to prophets through the remainder of the monarchy and beyond, until the “400 years of silence” between the Testaments.

In the modern world, we often think of a prophet as someone who predicts the future, but in the Old Testament, they were often more like preachers, proclaiming God’s word to the people.³ Some scholars also call them “covenant enforcement mediators” because their messages typically told the people how they were breaking the covenant and called them to repent and turn back to God. Prophets didn’t make up new laws or doctrines; they reminded the people of what God had already said in His law.⁴

In the ancient world, all kings employed professional “prophets” to seek a word or vision for them from their gods.⁵ In Israel, sometimes the professional prophets were sent by God and did hear His voice, like Samuel, Nathan and Gad. Other times, the professional “prophets” just told the king what he wanted to hear to stay in his good graces. Kings had lots of advisors, but a godly prophet didn’t give the king his own advice or say what the king wanted to hear. He spoke only what the Lord gave him to say (Numbers 24:12–13). Even when it was hard, as Samuel’s relaying God’s judgment to Eli or Nathan confronting David about his sin. True messengers of God will not be swayed by fear or bribes or power. They will not add to the message or take away from it but will only speak what God says (2 Chronicles 18:13).

Q: How can we know that what we hear taught/preached is truly God’s Word?

Q: How would you rate the biblical literacy of the average churchgoer? What advice/tools would you share with someone who wants to increase their understanding of Scripture?

2 Samuel 12:7–15; Matthew 5:10–12; and 2 Timothy 4:1–5 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Godly prophets preach God’s Word, no matter the personal cost.

Q: What risk was Nathan taking by confronting David’s sin? Why did he do it?

Q: What did Jesus tell His disciples about persecution for the sake of the Gospel?

Throughout the monarchy, God continued to raise up prophets who would speak His word to Israel's kings and the people of God. They usually told them things they really didn't want to hear. Very rarely would the kings repent and turn back to the Lord because of what the prophets preached, the way David did when Nathan confronted him (2 Kings 22:11; 2 Samuel 12). They usually rejected the prophets, persecuted them, or even killed them (Nehemiah 9:26; Matthew 5:12; 23:37). The life of a prophet was hard. In the days of David, they were treated well because David wanted to hear from the Lord, even if it was to be held accountable for his sin. But later prophets, such as Elijah and Jeremiah, found themselves on the run for their lives, beaten, or thrown into a pit to die. Some of the prophets were even given difficult assignments from God as part of their message – Hosea had to marry an adulteress; Jeremiah had to wear a yoke on his neck; Isaiah had to walk naked and barefoot for three years.

The call to become a prophet wasn't a call to an easy, comfortable life. It was usually a call to persecution and rejection and could be scary to receive. Even Samuel, who was treated well as a prophet, was afraid at first to tell Eli the message God had for him because it wasn't good. We may not think about it when we read the story of Nathan's confronting David, because David responded well and repented, but Nathan took a huge risk in confronting the king like that. David had just had Uriah killed to cover up his sin. He could have had Nathan killed, too. But he didn't. He listened to the hard truth preached to him and repented. This is what made him different from most other kings, a man after God's own heart.

God did not promise His prophets a comfortable or even a safe life, but He did promise to be with them (Jeremiah 1:7–8). Things might get really scary, but godly prophets fear God rather than people and choose to deliver His message even if it means they may be killed for it (Matthew 10:28). Godly prophets preach God's Word, no matter the cost to themselves. The New Testament says that disciples of Jesus can expect persecution like the prophets experienced from those who don't want to hear the hard truths (Matthew 5:10-12; John 15:18-27). But Scripture tells us that rebuke and correction from God's Word is how we grow (2 Timothy 3:16). We are to preach the hard truths of God's Word no matter what people want to hear (2 Timothy 4:1–5). This is the calling of "prophets."

Q: Describe how your life as a disciple has not been easy or comfortable.

Q: How have you experienced rejection or persecution for speaking hard truths?

Q: What cost did Jesus pay as He communicated truth and followed the Father's will?

Q: Why is the life of a disciple of Jesus worth it even if it's hard?

Deuteronomy 18:15–22; John 7:37–44; 12:49–50; and Hebrews 1:1–4 [Read]

Talking Point 3: The role of the prophets points us ahead to Christ.

Q: How can we know that Christ was the prophet Moses promised?

Q: How did Jesus fulfill the role of prophet in a greater way than anyone before Him?

Moses promised that the Lord would raise up a prophet like himself who would speak all that God commanded him (Deuteronomy 18:15–18). Jesus told His disciples that, like a true prophet, He didn't speak His own words but only what the Father told Him to say (John 12:49–50). God told Moses that this prophet to come was the one to whom we should listen, and when John baptized Jesus, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5).

Like the prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus was persecuted, rejected, and even killed for His message. The powers that be didn't want to hear what He had to say, so they conspired to kill him (John 11:47–53). Jesus told His disciples that the world hated him because He was not of this world, and the people of the world loved the darkness rather than the light (John 3:16–21; 15:18–27). Yet, Jesus continued to preach God's message, no matter the cost to Himself (Luke 22:42).

Jesus' teaching was different from any prophet, rabbi or teacher who came before Him. People were amazed at His teaching, not only because of what He taught but also the authority with which He taught (Matthew 7:28–29). Miraculous signs accompanied His teaching so that people would know He was from God (Acts 2:22). Most people who met Jesus figured He must be a prophet (John 4:19). Many asked if He were the prophet whom Moses had promised (John 7:40).

A prophet "like Moses" would be one to whom God spoke directly – mouth to mouth, not through dreams, visions or riddles (Numbers 12:6–8). We know that Jesus spoke directly with God (John 11:42), but even more, Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30). The writer of Hebrews tells us that for centuries, God spoke to His people through prophets, but now He speaks to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-4). Not only the words of Jesus, but the very person of Jesus. Because Jesus is "the exact imprint of His nature," when we see the way Jesus interacted with lepers or Pharisees or Samaritans or the way He reacted to the moneychangers in the temple, we can know that this is how God would have interacted with them or reacted in that situation. His very person speaks God's word to us. This is why John called Him "The Word" (John 1:1). Jesus was the Word of God made flesh, the Word of God with skin on. He was all God wanted to say to us. Jesus was the ultimate prophet – spokesperson for God – because He is God Himself.

Q: Why are you personally sure that Jesus is the Son of God? Why do you personally believe He is the Word of God made flesh?

Q: How does knowing Jesus is God affect the way you listen to His teaching?

Week 33: David: The Four Offices: Prophet

Took

Main Point: Jesus, being the Word made flesh, is God's ultimate spokesperson.

Charles Sheldon published a bestselling book in 1896 titled "*In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?*" in which a town was radically changed by each citizen asking themselves the question before acting. Fast forward to 1989, when the book reached the hands of Janie Tinklenverg, a youth leader at Calvary Reformed Church in Holland. Inspired, she produced 300 W.W.J.D. bracelets and the movement spread across America.⁶ Millions of teenagers wore merchandise that challenged them to think like God's ultimate spokesperson.

What a blessing for us to reflect on the words and actions of Jesus and know that He is God.

Q: Why is Jesus so helpful to us as we seek to understand God?

Q: What daily disciplines do you engage in to meditate on Jesus' words and actions?

CHALLENGES

THINK: Why is it difficult for you to speak hard truths to people? Why is it difficult to speak hard truths to yourself? Or to hear them from others? How can you have the boldness and courage to speak God's Word even when it is hard to hear? In what areas of your own life, the church, or the world is God calling you to be a prophetic voice and speak the hard truths we all need to hear?

PRAY for a passion for God's Word. Commit to a structured, consistent time of daily prayer and Scripture reading and ask the Lord to bless it. Pray that He would help you understand the Bible and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, use it to make you more like Jesus.

ACT: Be consistent in your daily quiet time with the Lord and weekly attendance in Worship Services and LifeGroup. God has spoken through His Word – be refreshed, encouraged, and educated by it.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we will look at another office of leadership in Israel, the priest. We will see how Jesus is our ultimate High Priest, the mediator between us and God. And yet, He is the ultimate sacrifice as well.

¹ <https://www.cbr.com/why-mcdonalds-retired-ronald-mcdonald-mascot/>

² <https://www.therichest.com/rich-powerful/they-are-lovin-it-mcdonalds-most-expensive-celebrity-endorsements/>

³ Gary V. Smith, *The Prophets as Preachers: An Introduction to the Hebrew Prophets* (B&H Academic, 1998).

⁴ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 2003)

⁵ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Harper Collins, 1962). See also Numbers 22–24.

⁶ <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-is-the-origin-of-the-phrase-what-would-jesus-do.html>