

The Threefold Office: *Christ the Prophet*

Acts 3:17-26

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn to HCC on December 1, 2013

Introduction

- ❖ The problem a lot of people have with the God of the Bible is that he talks back. If it wasn't for the fact that he talks back, we'd probably have a lot more believers in the world. Because a silent god is a much more appealing god.
 - ▶ I remember the first time I walked into an Eastern temple. I saw worshippers kneeling before these huge, intimidating statues. They were ornately decorated and fashioned to look like ghoulish warriors. Honestly, I was creeped out.
 - I remember thinking, "*What in the world is so appealing about this? Why are these worshippers drawn to these creepy statues? It made no sense.*"
- ❖ But now as I reflect back, it makes perfect sense. A silent god is an appealing god even if it's a creepy-looking god. **People will take a creepy god over a speaking God.** *Why?* Because a God who speaks – who talks back – is a God who could potentially challenge you. He might oppose you. He's a God who could disagree with your values, who might contradict your principles, who may take issue with your life choices.
 - ▶ A statue, on the other hand, might be creepy but at least it won't talk back. At least it won't say anything to outrage you. It'll be perfectly silent. Just the way you like it. *Don't you see how it makes perfect sense?* A silent god is a much more appealing god.
- ❖ That's why I said people have a problem with the God of the Bible, the Christian God. It's because our God is a speaking God. He is not silent. He has never been silent. He speaks.
 - ▶ **Now there are times when he speaks by direct, unmediated revelation.** There are examples of this in the Bible. Just think of Jesus' baptism where in that moment the crowd around the river Jordan heard a voice from the heavens declare, "*This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.*" (Mt. 3:17) So he does that. God speaks by direct, unmediated revelation.
- ❖ But most of the time in the Bible, he doesn't. **Instead, most of the time God speaks by indirect, mediated revelation, that is, through prophets.** He uses men and their mouths to speak forth his message.
 - ▶ Now it might sound like a cool job to be a prophet, to be an official spokesperson and messenger for the God of the Universe. But then you read in Scripture about how the prophets of God were despised. They were treated poorly and often violently. People would shut their ears and refuse to listen.
- ❖ People rejected the prophets. *Why?* Because they were speaking on behalf of a speaking God. **People are going to reject a speaking God and whoever claims to speak on his behalf.**
 - ▶ People don't want a God who speaks hard truth. And they'll reject anyone God uses as a channel to communicate that truth.

Two Views of Truth In Our Day

- ❖ And it's not just ancient people in the Bible who react this way. This is the mindset of people today. You see, there are two predominant ways of looking at truth in our day.

- ❖ **First, there's the view of the secularist.** The view that says there is no God. There is no objective standard of Truth out there, and even if there was, it's unknowable.
 - ▶ So in the view of secularism, you really can only know what your senses tell you, what can be determined by empirical study. Yes, scientific facts and natural laws exist. But there's no such thing as truth that tells you the purpose of life or what's right versus wrong. This is the viewpoint of relativistic, postmodern secularism.

- ❖ **The second is the view of the new age spiritualist.** This is the view that says we're all gods. We're all capable of forming our own standards, our own truth. This is new age spirituality. Truth is found by searching within, not by reading anything in a book.
 - ▶ So one view says, "*There is no truth*". The other says, "*Truth is in you*". But, as Tim Keller puts it, both are saying that when you get up in the morning you have nobody to obey. **Both views reject the notion of obedience because obedience implies submitting yourself to a truth outside of yourself.**

- ❖ Both views say, "You are your own prophet." But Christianity says, "No, God has to send you a prophet". **You need someone who stands outside of you and speaks truth that does not originate from you.** You need words and commands impressed upon you.
 - ▶ We all need this because, in our ignorance, we don't know God rightly or know how to live in right relationship with him. That's why he sent prophets.
 - He knows that, left to our own devices, we'll make gods out of created things, out of other people, or we'll fashion gods in our own image (Rom. 1:23). Left to ourselves, we'll just keep talking to our gods, offering up prayers and supplications, but without ever listening.

- ❖ That's why God sent prophets. **And the greatest prophet sent by God is none other than Jesus Christ himself.** Our passage this morning says that over a thousand years prior, the prophet Moses predicted that God would send another prophet like him to bring a message you must listen to. To refuse to listen, to ignore him, is a matter of eternity. Your soul hangs in the balance.
 - ▶ Now our natural impulse is to reject such a man, to close our ears to his message. We'd rather be our own prophets, our own sources of truth. But this morning, I'm here to urge you to carefully listen to this man. **This prophet brings a greater blessing that you can imagine because, really, he's more than a prophet.**

- ❖ This Sunday is the start of Advent, and we're beginning a series on **the Threefold Office of Christ.** It's a theological category first developed by the 16th-century reformer, John Calvin. It's just a way of grasping the person and work of Jesus, of comprehending who he is and what he came to do on earth.
 - ▶ The three offices are the offices of prophet, of priest, and of king. Throughout the Old Testament, we see God raise up **prophets** – those who functioned as God's messengers speaking God's Word to God's people.

- He also appointed **priests** – those who functioned as God’s mediators offering sacrifices and intercession on behalf of God’s people. And he anointed **kings** – those who functioned as God’s representatives exercising God’s rule over God’s people.
- ❖ The Threefold Office of Christ is the idea that Jesus enters the picture in the New Testament as the fulfillment of all three offices. **He is the True and Better Prophet, Priest, and King that all the Old Testament prophets, priests, and kings were ultimately pointing to.** Now this morning our focus is just on the office of Prophet.
 - ▶ **I want to give three reasons why anyone here who is seeking God should listen to Jesus the Prophet.** Listen to Jesus 1) because he speaks a message from God, 2) because he *is* the message of God, and 3) because you’ll be blessed by his message.

This Prophet Speaks a Message from God

- ❖ The first point is this: **Listen to Jesus because He speaks a message from God.** In this sense, he’s a prophet like all other prophets. This is a fact that few would dispute. In fact, most religions are more than willing to affirm Jesus as a prophet.
 - ▶ **Jewish** scholars have always considered Jesus an important figure in bringing Judaism to the Gentile world. **Muslims** say Jesus (‘Isa) is the last and greatest of the Israelite prophets. They believe he was born of a virgin (but not divine), did miracles, revealed Allah, and prepared the way for the last and greatest prophet, Muhammad.
 - Contemporary **Buddhists** and **Hindus** describe Jesus as a *bodhisattva*, an enlightened soul who is capable of reaching Nirvana but delays doing so in order to remain on earth to save souls. And **deists** and other **nonbelievers** are still willing to praise Jesus as a great teacher, a revealer of truth.
- ❖ But when you encounter Jesus in the gospels, you quickly realize that he’s different. Prophets typically claim to speak on behalf of some transcendent being, to speak with that god’s authority. That was the case for Old Testament prophets.
 - ▶ **All of them would start off their prophecies with, "Thus says the LORD". But Jesus would show up and say, "Truly, truly I say unto you."** (Mt. 5:22) The Word of the LORD had to come to other prophets, but Jesus spoke as one who had authority in himself. The crowds were always astonished by this (Mt. 7:28-29). They realized he was a prophet in a class of his own. We’ll see that clearly in today's passage
- ❖ Now we’re jumping right in the middle of a chapter and in the middle of an incident that occurred at the Jerusalem temple not long after Jesus' death and resurrection. The Apostles Peter and John have just healed a man who had been lame from birth, and now a crowd of Israelites gather around amazed. Then Peter addresses the crowd and says it's by the name of Jesus – whom you denied and delivered up to be crucified – it's by his name this man has been healed.

- ❖ Now his main point, found in v19, is that his hearers need to repent and turn back to God, which is possible because, as Peter acknowledges in v17, they acted in ignorance. **He's alluding to a distinction in Mosaic Law between high-handed sins intentionally committed versus unintentional sins committed in ignorance.** That's why the Law established cities of refuge (cf. Num. 35:11).
 - ▶ Let's say you accidentally kill someone. You commit manslaughter. You could flee to one of these cities for refuge from any retaliation by a next of kin. But intentional murders had no provision like this. There was no refuge.
 - So what Peter is saying to the crowd is that you're guilty of killing Jesus, but because of your ignorance God has graciously provided a refuge to which you must flee. But this time it's not a city. It's a man. It's the resurrected Christ, the very man you denied.

- ❖ "Brothers, you had no idea what you were doing", Peter says. But God knew exactly what he was doing. In v18, Peter says all that occurred, everything that happened to Jesus (his suffering and death), was all according to plan, according to prophecy.
 - ▶ He's essentially saying, "Brothers, you had no idea what you were doing when you delivered up Jesus to die. But it's not as if you thwarted God's plans. Jesus going to the cross was not a blunder. It wasn't a mistake. It was a mission. It was a plan, and you unknowingly played a part."
 - But in v19, Peter makes it clear that God's sovereignty doesn't excuse man's responsibility. **Just because God planned for the cross all along doesn't mean those who put him on the cross are off the hook.** No, they still need to repent, to turn from their sin and turn back to God.

- ❖ Peter then goes on to describe three blessings that come to them if they repent (which we'll come back to). And then in v22, he explains that these promised blessings are coming through a man much like the prophet Moses whom you revere.
 - ▶ Look at vv22-23 again, *"²²Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. ²³And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'"*
 - This is coming from **Deuteronomy 18:15**. Moses predicted that one day the Lord will raised up another prophet like himself. Now to be a prophet like Moses is significant since Moses was already a prophet in a class of his own.

- ❖ Most Old Testament prophets were itinerant. They would come and go. When they showed up, they had a word from the LORD, and after delivering their message they would typically leave. Usually you had to send a servant to go fetch a prophet.
 - ▶ But Moses was different. He dwelt among the people, and not only that, he stood up and led the people as a shepherd leads his flock. He was a **leader-prophet**. By the Word of the LORD, he led his people to freedom, to liberation.

- ❖ **So by Jesus' day, this Deuteronomy 18 expectation of a Moses-like prophet took on messianic proportions.** By Jesus' day, people were looking for the Prophet – this leader-prophet who will liberate us from Roman rule. So we read in places like **John 6:14** where crowds are saying about Jesus, "*This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!*"
 - ▶ And Jesus gladly embraced the role. Like Moses, he dwelt among his people (Jn. 1:14). Like Moses, he spoke the Word of God. Like Moses, he led his people by that Word. Jesus was a leader-prophet, a good shepherd, who led his flock to freedom.
 - And in his day, Moses said, "Just as you listen to me, just as you obey my words as the very words of God, I want you to listen to this man, this prophet like me that God will raise up." V23, "*And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.*"

- ❖ **Jesus is not just a wise man, a sage who speaks in proverbs and platitudes.** His message is not just good advice. It's the very words of God, words that lead to freedom. And every soul who does not listen to his message remains in the grips of sin and "shall be destroyed". That's the word for *utter destruction*, to be completely cut off from the people of God.
 - ▶ This is why we should listen to Jesus in whatever he has to say. He speaks an eternally significant message from God. Our souls hang in the balance.

This Prophet is the Message of God

- ❖ But the Bible goes further. It doesn't just say Jesus speaks God's message. It says he *is* God's message. This is the second reason we need to listen to what this man has to say. **Listen to Jesus because He speaks a message from God and because He *is* the message of God.**

- ❖ Look at v18. Peter says that in Jesus and in the events surrounding his death and resurrection, God fulfilled what he foretold by the mouth of "*all the prophets*". That word *all* is important. **He means that *all the prophets in the Old Testament were speaking messages from God, but all of them were essentially talking about one and the same thing.***
 - ▶ Look further down at v24. "*And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.*" What is Peter saying? He's saying that all the prophecies of all the prophets have come true. In what? In Jesus!

- ❖ Even Jesus understood himself to be the very point of Old Testament prophecy. If you recall, on the road to Emmaus, he walks with two disciples and it says that, "*beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*" (Lk. 24:27) All the scriptures point to him!
 - ▶ Here's another verse. **Hebrews 1:1**, "*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*" So God used to speak by the prophets, but in these last days (which we're still in) he has spoken by the prophet of prophets. Jesus is *the* Prophet. The last one.

- ❖ After him, there are no more Old Testament-like prophets who speak divinely-inspired prophecies. *Why?* Because all of those prophets were talking about him.

- ▶ Jesus is more than just another in a great line of prophets. He's the very one they were speaking about. He's not just one of the messengers. Calling him the greatest of messengers is still doesn't cut it. Jesus *is* the message (Lk. 24:27; 44-48).
- ❖ Do you get what this means? **This means Christianity is not just about a way to live.** It's not just about following a moral code passed down from a wise prophet.
 - ▶ Now, of course, Jesus does tell us how to live. He tells you to forgive others. He tells you to love your enemies. He says you should be generous to the poor. Jesus tells us many things about how we ought to live as follower of him. But here in our passage it says the whole of Scripture is pointing to something more significant. **Jesus didn't come just to tell you about a way to live your life. Jesus came to *be* your life.**
- ❖ All prophets say they're bringing us God's Word, but Jesus *is* God's Word made incarnate (Jn. 1:1). All prophets claim to speak the truth, but Jesus is the Truth (Jn. 14:6). He claims to be a living truth. Truth in bodily form. Truth made personal so we can know God personally.
 - ▶ Do you see the implications? **Because Jesus is a living truth, you don't really know him if you simply believe a bunch of facts about him.** To know him is to trust him as a person. There's a big difference.
- ❖ This summer we spent a lot of time at the pool. And now that she's older, my daughter has the ability (and the courage) to do a lot more. So one of the things she really likes to do is jump off the edge of the pool into my arms.
 - ▶ Imagine I'm in the water and Talia is on the edge looking at me. Now she can believe a lot of facts about her daddy. She can believe I'm a solid 6', 180 lbs, with strapping biceps and impeccable strength. But just believing those facts is nothing compared to actually leaping into the water trusting that her daddy is strong enough to catch her.
- ❖ In the same way, just believing facts about Jesus is not enough. You can rattle off a bunch of facts. But that doesn't mean anything. **Jesus is the Living Truth, so at some point you have to take that leap in trusting in him as a person.**
 - ▶ Jesus is not just a prophet with a message for you to receive. No, he stands before you as *the* Message himself. It's the person you have to receive. Christianity is not just about a way to live. Christianity is Christ.

This Prophet's Message is not a Burden but a Blessing

- ❖ Now I know your gut reaction is to reject any prophet, to reject any authority or authoritative message that originates outside of yourself. But this is a prophet unlike any other. Yes, his message still obliges our obedience but it's a message unlike any other. It's not a message that burdens but a message that blesses.
 - ▶ That's our final point: **Listen to Jesus because you'll be blessed by his message.** It's a message *not* of good advice about what you need to do. It's primarily a message of good news about what he *has* done and *will* do for you.

- ❖ Let's look back at v19 and consider those promised blessings. *“¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.”*
- ❖ Notice with me three blessings that come with repentance. **First, it says our sins will be blotted out.** That word literally means to wash off, to erase. As one commentator explains it, *“Ancient writing was upon papyrus, and the ink used had no acid in it. It therefore did not bite in the papyrus as modern ink does; it simply lay upon the top of it. To erase the writing a man might take a wet sponge and simply wipe it away.”*¹
 - ▶ That's what happens when God blots out our sins. He wipes our slate clean. Instead of striking us dead, God says if you repent and turn back to him, he'll open up the book of your life and, starting with page 1, he'll take a soaking wet cloth and wipe it clean.
 - He'll wipe every page of trespasses until the entire book is clean. And then you'll notice it stained blood-red. That's because it's a cloth soaked in the blood of Jesus. The guilt of your past, the guilt of rejecting Jesus for all these years, will be wiped clean!
- ❖ The second blessing that comes with repentance is this: **It says, in v20, that times of refreshing will come to you from the having the presence of the Lord.** This is the positive counterpart to forgiveness; not just the removal of sin but the restoration of communion with the Lord, his presence refreshes our spirits.
 - ▶ All of us from Houston know what it means to experience a summer heat that is so stifling, so oppressive, that it saps every bit of energy out of your body. And when you've spent an afternoon in that kind of heat, what's the best feeling in the world?
 - It's when you walk into a perfectly air-conditioned building and it hits you in the face – a refreshing breeze of cool air. That's the best. That's what the presence of the Lord feels like. That's what Jesus brings.
- ❖ The third blessing is this: **In v21, it says Jesus will one day return to restore all things.** That's a reference to the cosmic, universal restoration of all creation – the undoing of the Fall – where all things will be made new, everything sad will come untrue. Peter is pointing to the promised New Heavens and New Earth (cf. Rev. 21-22).
 - ▶ When **Acts 3:8** describes the lame man “leaping up” the word used is *exallomai*. It's a rare word in the Bible, but it's used specifically in the Greek version of the Old Testament in **Isaiah 35:6** about a future, promised age when *“the lame man will leap like a deer”*. Do you see what's happening here? This miracle performed by Peter and John is a foretaste of the promised restoration that Jesus is bringing.

¹ William Barclay, quoted in John Stott's *The Message of Acts (Bible Speaks Today)*, 93.

- ❖ Look at v26, “*God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.*” He came to bless you. *How? How does he bless you?* By turning you from your wicked ways. He’s not here just to fill you with facts, with good advice. **No, Jesus is here to bless you by changing your ways, changing your life.**
 - ▶ This alone is his prerogative. Christ alone can change a life. This is where Jesus surpasses Moses and all other prophets. Prophets usually tell you hard truths you don't want to hear. Granted, you might need to hear it but still you don't like to hear it.
 - “*You need to stop doing that. You need to start doing this.*” Prophets are all about calling out your sin and calling you to repentance, calling you to obedience. We don't like to hear it.

- ❖ To be honest, Jesus will say the same things. But then he’ll say to take your eyes off yourself and your shortcomings and to fix them on him, the better Moses. Moses sent the plagues of God upon one nation to bless another. **But Jesus, the Better Moses, bore the plague upon himself when he died on that cross – that all nations, all peoples, might be blessed.**
 - ▶ Moses led the people to freedom. He broke the yokes of slavery. But even in their freedom, even in the Promised Land, they were still in bondage. There were no chains on their hands or feet, but there were chains on their hearts. They were enslaved to their wicked ways, to their sin.
 - Humanity's greatest need is a spiritual liberation – a freedom only Jesus can provide. **Only Jesus frees us from the penalty and enslaving power of sin.** Only Jesus has the authority to grant repentance, to turn every one of you from your wickedness and back to God.

- ❖ Listening to a prophet feels like a burden. It's all a bunch of do's and don't's. But listening to Jesus is a blessing. **It's all about what he has done and will do for you and about how that transforms and sanctifies all that you do for him.**
 - ▶ Friends, this Advent season we celebrate the coming Messiah, the coming Prophet, the One who speaks a word of gospel, a word of good news. Listen to him.