

Read also *Philippians 2:2-11*.

We hear about prophets. The respected ones are in the Bible. Because true prophets are rare, we do not always understand what they do. They bring good news and bad news. They tell us what we need to do and they point to the future.

Prophets spend lots of time alone listening to God and, they have a commission to share God's message. For example:

- Moses was told how to go to Pharaoh, part the Red Sea, get the people across, and lead and feed the people through the wilderness. He pointed to the Promised Land and to the Law.
- David, as king, led people to worship God. He wrote Psalms. He understood and predicted that his throne would never end—a prediction that Jesus would fulfill.
- Isaiah willingly said, "Here I am, send me!" when he saw a vision of God in the temple. He gave us many of the prophecies regarding the Messiah that we read every Advent, which, as we view it looking back, reflect his coming to earth perfectly accurately.
- Jeremiah predicted the exile of God's people out of their own country to be scattered throughout Gentile territory. But this would turn them back to God so God's people would eventually be saved.

The prophets thus told good news and bad news as the messages come. Life often feels like moving a giant boulder uphill for the prophet. But they strive to help us see life from God's perspective and to live "under God" because God is Lord of this world.



Eugene Peterson points out in *Run with the Horses* that names are significant. Names anticipate not just who we are but what we become. Jeremiah's name points to the two opposing tensions: "God is exalted" and "God hurls." Jeremiah lifts God up continually but also hurls this message of truth with no sugar coating. The only way we live to be a complete, mature human being is to heed this message.¹ You heard the message from Jeremiah 5:1-9.

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Run with the Horses: the Quest for Life at its Best*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 30.

Are you taking Jeremiah's message to heart? God is looking for people who are truthful, faithful, and will take correction. But the people, all of them, refused to turn back to God.

Note this phrase in his message:

1. "Search its squares and see if you can find one person who acts justly and seeks truth-- so that I may pardon Jerusalem. (v. 1) and again,
2. "Their transgressions are many, their apostasies are great. *How can I pardon you?* (6b-7) and the question,
3. "Should I not punish them for this? Should I not avenge myself against such a nation?" (9)

People are accountable to God. We bear the burden of our decisions if we ignore God. They did not act faithfully but had "lowered the ceiling" on life by creating idols. Idols have no opinions about how you live. They were earthly things which limited people's vision to earth. But God is the maker of heaven and earth.

"I believe in God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth."

Earthly focus means you are able to "break God's bonds." God's people broke their marriage vows and took their neighbor's wives. They were fulfilling their own sinful desires, even though they were "created in the image of God."

Humans do not require themselves to be good to their neighbors, but God does. As Jesus would say to God's people: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Mt 7:12).

"Should I not punish them for this?" God asked. The entire nation was "his people," don't they owe God something? The "earth is the Lord's" but these people had abandoned heaven's opinion.

And yet God wants to pardon them. What is God to do?

While God's people had abandoned his ways, God's mind is on pardon. Yet there is not one person that can stand on his or her own merits before God. Paul said, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). No one is perfect. No one can effect salvation for us. So you see the dilemma. In addition, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

God wants life for us, but we can't fake it. We can't lower the ceiling and pretend heaven doesn't exist. God exists. We are here because of God. We are accountable.

What would be needed to change human beings whose "faces are harder than rock" as Jeremiah says? Have you seen someone whose "face is hard as rock?" If God could bring forth someone to change this, to bring salvation, what would be needed? What can reverse the consequence of death? This would be an amazing miracle. We have just a picture of that. Let's turn now to Philipians 2.

Jesus opened up heaven because God Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth. God opened up heaven when God sent Jesus as a human.

Jesus is not just human but is also 100% God.

His name means "God with us."

Jesus is from heaven but born – and not subject to sin.

Jesus trusted fully in God, acted justly, spoke the truth.

Sin = no trust in God

Sin = self first

Jesus is king.

Jesus "did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped, rather he humbled himself. He came dependent, vulnerable; obedient. He took up the position of a slave.

Whenever you hear the word "slave," you need to think of Jesus.

He came as a child; he humbled himself as a slave. He was utterly dependent.

Let's contrast that to the one called king. Herod. He was mentioned many times during the period of Jesus' birth: "Herod the Great" builder of cities. He was not truthful. He set up his own system of living, killing citizens at will when he was threatened. Jesus' parents would take their child and flee from Herod.

But you know what? Herod the earthly ruler who had no regard for heaven or God is now *Herod the Dead*.²

Death takes away everything for the one who does not know God.

And that's what God wants to avoid for you and me, if we believe. You cannot avoid the judgment of death. But God wants those who seek him to have a way of escape. And so for Jesus it was worth slavery, humility, and dying on a cross.

This was an obedient, trusting act. Jesus fully trusted that God wants to pardon.

Jesus did the very thing that we fear most, putting control in God's hands.

But God is God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And so because Jesus followed God's plan completely, God opened up the heavens for us.

Jesus stood in our place to open earth to heaven. The cross was the lowest point. It's like hurling sin and Satan away. But the Greek word for cross, σταυρός, is also the highest point—it means cross, but it also means "to be lifted up"—exaltation. Remember Jeremiah's name? He hurls, and he exalts God. He points to Jesus.

Jesus was lifted up to the Name that was Above Every Name to receive power, riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing when every knee—notice it says in heaven and on earth (and under the earth)—will bow. Jesus is ALIVE and he brings us with him!

This is God's Glory—the power of resurrection. No one else could accomplish it.

Only Jesus alone. Because he trusted God and God wanted to pardon, he ascended.

He came down; He ascended. He is seated in power at the right hand of God—as judge of the living and the dead.

God asks, "How will I pardon the ones who are guilty, who have lowered their vision to themselves as gods of their own lives? Through my only Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who was:

Conceived by the Holy Spirit,

Born of the virgin Mary,

Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

The third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father

And he will come to judge the living and the dead.

This is how God would mercifully pardon them when they were stuck their own way.

Open up heaven in your own life. Be pardoned. Receive life.

AMEN

² John Ortberg, *Who is this Man?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 24.