

Word – God’s Gracious voice: Isaiah to Malachi

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Date: 28 February 2016

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[0 : 00] who are elected and raised up will be those who speak out for the most vulnerable, provide for those who are in need, making sure that resources and needs are given to those who are without.

We pray, Father, that we would seek to keep our leaders accountable, but that we would also pray for them, praying that they would know the help of God in their lives as they seek to lead a nation. And yet, Father, we thank you that you have not left us in the dark to any of these things. You have given to us your word. And so we want you to speak to us afresh today, that we would listen carefully, be aware of what you are saying and applying it to our lives.

So please help us all this morning in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if you'd turn, please, to Deuteronomy chapter 18.

That's where we're first going to start this morning. Deuteronomy chapter 18. As you're looking that up, we've been looking at the big story of God.

[1 : 45] And the wonderful story of the Bible is that God who spoke and created this world in which we live and breathed physical life into us has made himself known to us.

And we call this revelation. So God reveals himself to us by speaking to us through his words so that we can know him, so that we can love him, and enjoy him.

You see, unless God spoke to us, we would not know what God is like or how we should live in this world. So right at the very beginning of the story, right in Genesis, we see God telling us who he is and how we should live in relationship with him.

Now, one of the primary ways that God speaks to us is through his chosen prophets or through people like Moses.

So have a look at Deuteronomy chapter 18, verse 18. So this is God speaking through Moses. And this is what he says, God says.

[3 : 02] Verse 18. I will rise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth and he will tell them everything I command him.

If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. So the prophets were God's mouthpiece speaking the very words of God to others.

So as the prophets spoke, God's voice is heard. It was God's primary way of communicating with the people he had made for himself.

Now the prophets, like Moses, other people like Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha, these prophets really came to the fore during the time of the kings as we were looking at last week.

You see, the kings were also God's leaders set in place over the people to lead them towards God. But instead, the kings were leading them away from God.

[4 : 13] So instead of relationship with God, there was further rebellion against God. So in place of the kings, as it were, God raised up prophets who would speak his gracious word into their lives and into the situation, reminding them of who God is and how they should live in relationship with him.

Now one of those prophets that we're going to be looking at this morning was a man called Jeremiah. So you can go to the prophet Jeremiah. Keep going forwards in your Bible.

Jeremiah chapter 1. There's roughly 17 main prophets that are recorded for us in the Bible, starting with Isaiah and finishing with Malachi.

And one of the big prophets was a guy called Jeremiah. So Jeremiah chapter 1. Has somebody got a page number and I can call it out? 755.

755 if you're using a red covered Bible. 755. Jeremiah chapter 1. So here's one of the prophets that God raised up in that time to speak to the people.

[5 : 26] We'll pick it up in verse 4. The word of the Lord came to me. That's Jeremiah saying, Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.

Before you were born, I set you apart. Now on an aside, they're great words for those who want to change the Eighth Amendment, aren't they?

I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. Ah, sovereign Lord, I said, I do not know how to speak. I'm only a child. But the Lord said to me, Do not say I am only a child.

You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you, declares the Lord.

Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, Now I have put my words in your mouth.

[6 : 30] God's mouthpiece, you see, speaking the very words of God to others. Now when we look at the prophets, there's lots that they have to say, but we can really say that their message comes in three different parts.

There's three parts to their message. Here's the first one. God's word confronts our sin. You see, one of the ways our relationship with God is explained is by using the illustration of marriage.

So look at chapter 2, verse 1. Again, and just make note of all the reference, the word coming to Jeremiah. So the word of the Lord came to me.

Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem. I remember the devotion of your youth. How as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert through a land not sown.

So here we've got a wonderful picture of a faithful, loyal marriage. God has loved us. He's made us his people. We belong to him. We are, verse 2, his bride.

[7 : 47] Now a marriage relationship is to be exclusive. So when someone in the marriage is unfaithful, that means the relationship breaks.

And that's what we see happens to God's people, Israel. Have a look at chapter 3, verse 6. Chapter 3, verse 6.

So during the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, have you seen what faithless Israel has done? Remember Israel where it was the nation in the north?

She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there. In other words, she's given herself over to other gods and to other things.

Verse 7, I thought that after she had done all this, she would return to me, but she did not and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it. I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of her adultery.

[8 : 57] Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear. She also went out and committed adultery. You see, there's nothing more hurtful than a husband or a wife leaving for someone else.

The one left behind is heartbroken, their love has been betrayed, their intimacy is shattered, all trust has been lost. So it would take an enormous, immense love to reach out to the person who has left and had an affair or had an adulterous affair, to reach out to them and to welcome them back and to say, I forgive you.

And that's what God does. God is jealous for his people because he loves his people. He reaches his hand out to them and says, come back to me.

Look at verse 11 of chapter 3. The Lord said to me, faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah. So go proclaim this message towards the north.

Return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord. I will frown on you no longer for I am a merciful God, declares the Lord. I will not be angry forever.

[10 : 21] Only acknowledge your guilt. You have rebelled against the Lord your God. You have scattered your favours to foreign gods under every spreading tree and have not obeyed me, declares the Lord.

God is reaching out to them, calling the people, come back to me, return to me, take responsibility for your sin, own up to your adulterous affair and I will have mercy on you.

You see, God's aching desire is that his people, that people like us, that we would return return to our true love. Verse 14, return, faithless people, declares the Lord, for I am your husband.

Our relationship can be mended. I can forgive you. We can start afresh, come back to me, come back home with me.

But yet God pleads for them to return, but they do not repent. Verse 20, like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord.

[11 : 48] You see, it's a tragic story, isn't it, of broken love, of broken relationship. And the uncomfortable truth for us as we listen to this story is that we are so like Israel and Judah.

In his love, God has made us. God has provided us. Think of all the things that we have and all that we enjoy. God has given to us everything.

He sustains us with life, giving us the very breath we breathe right now. He's given us a world to enjoy. He made us, He created us for a relationship with Him, to know and experience His love. But like an unfaithful spouse, we have given our love to other things and other people. We don't love God with all our hearts and with all our soul and with all our mind.

Our love is so often self-centered. We hurt others with our words and we ignore what God has to say. But incredibly, God does not give up on us.

[12 : 55] He reaches out across that broken relationship and He offers to take us back again and again. Only, He says, acknowledge your guilt. Only take responsibility for your sin.

Return, faceless people, for I am your husband. Loyal, loving, caring. I will not let you down. Our relationship can be mended.

I can forgive you. We can start afresh. Come back to me, O people. Come back home with me. This is the God who confronts us with our sin and calls us back to Himself.

God. The second big message that the prophet brings is he announces our judgment.

You see, God held out His hand to the people, but because of their persistent, unrepentant sin, God said He would bring His judgment upon them.

[14 : 03] And the way in which He would bring His judgment is He would send the Babylonians, this growing nation in the north, who was going to come down to Judah and take them all off to slavery.

So have a look at chapter 4 verse 5. Follow with me, chapter 4 verse 5. Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say, sound the trumpet throughout the land.

There's a message, there's an announcement. Cry aloud and say, gather together, let us flee to the fort cities, rise the signal to go to Zion, flee for safety, without delay, for I am bringing disaster from the north, even terrible destruction.

Verse 16. Tell this to the nations, proclaim it to Jerusalem. A besieging army, that's Babylon, is coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah.

They surround her like men guarding a field because she has rebelled against me, declares the Lord. Why will this happen? Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you.

[15 : 23] This is your punishment. How bitter it is. How it pierces to the heart. God's judgment. Now to help us grasp the seriousness of these words, the seriousness of God's judgment, Jeremiah gives us three pictures, three visual pictures to help us understand.

First picture that he gives us, chapter 13, he says it will be an unbearable future, this judgment of God. Have a look at chapter 13.

In chapter 13, God says to Jeremiah, I want you to go out and to buy a belt. And this linen belt is something that he would wear around his waist.

It was a precious, a very important part of their clothing. So Jeremiah goes out and buys it and then God tells him, I want you to take this belt, this expensive belt, and bury it in the crevasse of some rocks.

Now let's pick it up in verse 6 of chapter 13. Many days later the Lord said to me, go now Jeremiah to Perth and get the belt I told you to hide there.

[16 : 36] So I went to Perth and I dug up the belt and I took it from the place where I had hidden it, but now it was ruined and completely useless.

Then the word of the Lord came to me. This is what the Lord says. In the same way I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.

These wicked people who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them, will be like this belt, completely useless.

us. You see, the attitude of the people was this, God's never going to judge me. God's so forgiving. After all, he rescued us from Egypt.

He wouldn't do that. Well, God does forgive, but he will not ignore the stubborn hearts who refuse to repent.

[17 : 39] For those who do not turn back to God, the future will be unbearable. Just as this belt rotted away, so the nation will be completely ruined and destroyed.

They will become useless, slaves in a distant land, not fit for anything. Why? Look at the end of verse 11. They have not listened.

But he also had another picture. He said it would be an inescapable punishment. Look at chapter 19, verse 1.

Chapter 19, verse 1. This is what the Lord says. Jeremiah, go and buy a clay jar from the potter, and take along with you some of the elders of the people and some of the priests.

Now read verse 10. Then take this clay jar and break the jar while those who go with you are watching and say to them, this is what the Lord Almighty says, I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired.

[19 : 08] they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room. You see, the point has come where there is no time to turn back.

There is no time to repent. That time has passed. Judgment is going to come. It will be inescapable for the people. There will be nowhere to run, nowhere to hide.

Verse 12. This is what I will do to this place and to those who live here, declares the Lord. I will make this city like Topheth. Now, Topheth was like the city dump where everything was thrown out, except for now, he says, the whole city is going to become a dump.

Not a rubbish, but a dump of dead bodies. Why? Verse 15. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says, listen, I am going to bring on this city and the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words.

Now, what we read should shock us, but we shouldn't be surprised. You see, Jeremiah is now 40 years into his ministry.

[20 : 33] He's been calling them back to God over 40 years, but they haven't listened. In fact, 800 years have passed since their rescue from slavery in Egypt.

That means 800 years of persistent rebellion and rejecting God and his grace, walking further and further away from him. God is so patient, longing that the people would return.

But yet, as we read of these images and these pictures, what happened to Judah is a picture of how seriously God takes our sin and our rebellion.

God longs for people to return to him, but he cannot and he will not overlook the ongoing evil that he sees all around us. In fact, what happened to Judah when Babylon came in and took over them is a sign of a universal judgment that is to come.

And here's the third picture that he gives us. Go to chapter 25. In chapter 5 we have this very disturbing vision that Jeremiah is given.

[21 : 46] And in this vision Jeremiah, as it were, is taken before all the nations of the world and before the nations of the world he's telling them that they have to drink this cup and this cup is filled with God's judgment and the nations of the world are to drink it.

Verse 15 This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me. Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath, my anger, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

And when they drink it they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them. You see Israel, God's people, they had rebelled against him but not only them, all the rest of the nations had done it as well.

So they too must drink it. So look at verse 19. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, his attendants, his officials, and all his people, and all the foreign people there, and all the kings of us, and all the kings of the Philistines.

Verse 22, all the kings of Tyre. 24, all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the people who live there. And verse 25, all the kings of Zimri.

[23 : 05] Verse 26, and all the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other, all the kingdoms on the face of the earth, and after all of them, the king of Sheshach, which is Babylon, will drink the cup too.

No one is excluded. No nation is led off the hook. This is a universal judgment.

Verse 28, and if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, this is what the Lord Almighty says, you must drink it. See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my name, and will you indeed go unpunished?

You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the Lord Almighty. Suppose you take a walk around Carragoline one night, and as you go for a walk you get attacked.

You get beaten up, and you get robbed. And later in the week you get news from the guards that the guy who did it has been caught, and you've got to go to the court to appear as a witness.

[24 : 33] And when you get to the court, the judge stands up and he makes this statement, case dismissed, what has happened does not matter.

How would you as a victim feel if a judge said that? Of course it matters. Where's the justice? Now do you think God, who is judge of all the earth, will dismiss everything that goes on and just say, you know what, it doesn't matter.

The rape and the torture and the beheading of ISIS? It doesn't matter. The trafficking of children as sex slaves? It doesn't matter.

The wars and the power struggles that leave millions homeless and without food? It doesn't matter. The hundreds of children and other people who have died as they've tried to make their escape from Syria across the Mediterranean Sea?

It doesn't matter. and the lies and the hurts that we cause? It doesn't matter. Our selfish actions, our stubborn behaviour, throw it all out, case dismissed, it doesn't matter.

[25 : 57] Live as you like and do as you please. Of course it matters. God looks and he sees upon the history of this world and the nations and he sees everything.

And God longs for us and for the world to return to him. But he cannot let us carry on as we please forever ruining and destroying our lives and the world around us.

He cannot ignore persistent and unrepentant sin. God will bring his judgment. And one day, each and every single person, every single person, ourselves included, will stand before God and give an account of our lives.

Not one person will be excluded. God's judgment will come and it will be unbearable.

It will be inescapable and it will come to all. But there's a third part to Jeremiah's message and that is a promise of hope.

[27 : 15] You see, while judgment should be expected, God also holds out this promise of hope. hope. You see, the Babylonians did come to Judah.

They did take them off into exile to Babylon where they were slaves. And there they would remain for 70 years. And while they're in captivity, Jeremiah writes this letter to them.

Have a look at chapter 29. Verse 10. These are well-known words, often quoted, important to read them in their context.

Jeremiah chapter 10 verse 20, sorry, Jeremiah 29 verse 10. So here's this letter that Jeremiah writes to these people who are sitting in judgment in a foreign land in slavery.

This is what the Lord says. When 70 years are completed, for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

[28 : 28] For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and you will find me and when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back from captivity.

I will gather you from all the nations and the places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.

What a letter to receive. Could you imagine hearing those words? this is a promise of hope.

Just as God had rescued them from slavery all those years ago in Egypt, God is going to come and redeem them from exile in Babylon. Because this is the kind of God that we have.

[29 : 30] His grace and mercy surprises us at every turn. When we think there is no more hope, God intervenes once again and delivers his promise of hope.

Now just as God's word has reminded us of our failure, so God's word tells us of a better future, something God is going to do, something new, something better.

There's two big things that Jeremiah tells us. He promises a new relationship with God for the people. Chapter 31, verse 31, God promises a new relationship for the people.

Verse 31, the time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. That covenant, that relationship, I'm going to bring that marriage relationship back together.

God has come and he promises to change them. You see, in the past, they didn't listen and they wouldn't obey. But now, verse 33, this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after

that time, declares the Lord.

[30 : 56] I will put my law in their minds and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they will be my people. God has come and he promises to change them on the inside.

I will give you a new heart to follow my ways. God's going to turn their minds and their hearts to him. So instead of a desire to love someone else or other things, they will have a desire to love God and to follow him.

But there's something more to this relationship. Look at the end of verse 34. He says, I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

God is going to no longer hold their sin against them. Every sin is going to be removed and wiped out. Never be to be remembered, never to be reminded.

And so a new relationship will be established. The past failures forgiven and a new heart to live for God.

[32 : 03] God says, I'm going to promise this new relationship for you. But he also promises something else for the people. He says, I promise you a new city.

Look at verse 38. The days are coming, declares the Lord, when this city, which had been destroyed, will be rebuilt for me.

From the tower of Hanel to the corner gate, the measuring line will stretch from there straight to the hill of Garib and then turn to Goa. So these are the great big boundaries of the city.

The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley onto the east as far as the corner of the horse gate will be holy to the Lord.

This city will never again be uprooted or demolished. You see, the city was always a place of peace and security.

[33 : 04] People came into the city for protection, to escape from harm and danger. But when they did, Babylon came in and overtook them and the city was destroyed.

Now God is saying to them, I'm going to build you a city, end of verse 40, that will never be uprooted or demolished. But read it carefully. This isn't just a city for God's people, this will be a city for God himself, verse 38.

The days are coming, declares the Lord, when this city will be rebuilt for me. God and the people will dwell in this city together where there will be no harm and no danger will ever come to it.

What a plan, what a future. A new relationship, a new heart, a new city, a new people.

This is the promised hope of God, spoken through his prophets. How is God going to do all of that?

[34 : 14] How can he on the one hand announce this judgment that is going to come, a universal judgment, and then at the same time promise this amazing hope and a future?

How can you have those two things together, judgment and hope, side by side? Well, Jeremiah's message didn't end there.

Jeremiah was the prophet who spoke of one to come. Have a look at Hebrews chapter 1. Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 1.

You see, God had promised, you remember how we started this morning in Deuteronomy? God said, I would raise up a prophet and I would put my words into his mouth and he would be my mouthpiece to the nations.

Well, that prophet did come. Chapter 1 verse 1. In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets, through people like Jeremiah at many times and in various ways.

[35 : 26] But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. Jesus is the last and ultimate prophet, the fulfilled prophet.

So everything that God has to say to us now is now said in Jesus. Jesus didn't just come speaking a message, Jesus himself is the message.

It's all about him and what he does. And as we read on in the story, we meet Jesus who is the perfect one, who stands before us and when we put ourselves beside him, we see what a failure and what a mess we are.

He is the perfect innocent, sinless one, but we are not. and we deserve the judgment of God because we are sinful and broken.

But yet this prophet, Jesus, is the one who comes and deals with the judgment. Jesus is like the belt that we read about in Jeremiah.

[36 : 34] Jesus was taken outside of the city. He was stripped bare. he was put on a cross, the crown of thorns shoved on his head. He became ruined and useless for us.

Jesus is like the clay pot that has been smashed and broken for us under the weight of God's judgment. You remember what Jesus said in Gethsemane as he faced his impending death? Jesus, he says, he cries out, Father, if you are willing will you take this cup from me? The cup of God's wrath. I do not want to go for it, but not my will, but your will be done.

And as Jesus hangs on the cross, he drinks that cup of God's wrath to its very last dregs. There is not one drop left, it is drunk dry, so that we do not have to face what we deserve.

And when we come in repentance to this prophet, he cleans us on the inside, he prepares us to be that beautiful bride, he gives us that new heart, a new clothing, a new inner self, a new mind, a new way to love him.

[37 : 55] And he takes us and he welcomes us to his eternal city, where we will dwell with God in the new city, the new heavens and the new earth, where no disaster will ever come again, where there will be no more death, no more pain, no more suffering.

But God and his people together living in that city as it's meant to be. But it doesn't end there. Because God, as it were, takes us and he says, I want you and I want you and I want us as the church to be the prophetic voice to the world today.

I send you, as it were, to be prophets into the world. Not making up our own message, not coming up with our own ideas and thoughts, but speaking the message of Christ to the world of a saviour who has come to do everything for us, to bring us into that relationship with him.

So where you go tomorrow at work, where you go tomorrow with your kids, where you're in college or whether you're in school, wherever you are, God is sending you as his prophet to speak his words into the darkness and into the hopelessness of the world to bring the promise of hope.

[39 : 22] That's what he sent us to do. God's prophets, to speak the message of hope, a new relationship, a new city, a wonderful saviour in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Father, we see so much of ourselves in this story.

We see our mess, we see our unfaithfulness, we see our adultery as we give our love to other things instead of to you.

But we find in you the perfect husband, as it were, who reaches out loyal, loving, forgiving, welcoming us back into relationship, providing the way in which that could be possible.

We thank you for what you have done. We thank you for your word, for its truth, for its message.

And we pray that we as your people would go into this world, into this community where you have us tomorrow.

[40 : 52] And when we speak about the elections, when we speak about the match, when we speak about the weather, you would give us courage to speak the words of God, the words of truth, the words of hope.

Father, we need your help. hope, and we pray that you would work in us and amongst us. May people run to you and find their faith and their salvation in you.

Amen. We're going to sing together.

It's a reflective piece. We've been listening to God. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.