

Prophecy and Being Prophetic

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[0 : 0 1] Morning, church. How are we doing? Buckle down. Are we ready for this? Well, what a great reading this morning. I'm just going to invite you to imagine that this morning you have picked up your news sheet or you have heard at the door or whether you've heard in the notice is that the Methodist and Anglican church have decided that we should all have an extra tax placed on it. It's called CAT, church added tax. And the good thing about they've decided for us that this tax will be collected each week and there'll be people on the doors as you arrive to collect this extra tax from each and every person. But don't worry if you don't come on a Sunday because they will charge you double the next week when you come. Or if you don't happen to appear for a few weeks, they'll come around and knock on your door. And they've decided that it's going to be somewhere around about £70 a week from each of us, which would actually involve just to cover a few extra expenses. And the people who collect it will actually have a bit of a rake-off of that as well.

So, sounds equitable? Sounds good? Sounds fair? No, I don't think so. It certainly doesn't sound godly. And if I was hearing this news this morning, I'd be thinking, do you know what, I'm a little bit miffed about that. No, no, actually, I think, no, I'm actually quite angry. No, no, actually, I think, I'm really angry about that. But what am I going to do about it? Well, welcome to this morning's reading. Welcome to this morning's reading because this is what everyday people in Jerusalem were faced with in our gospel story. This is what was taking place. This was the injustice, greed, and hypocrisy that they were faced with day by day by day in the name of God. Jesus, like many others, were observing the way that the temple was running and that the temple was being run not for the Lord, not for Jesus, not for God's purposes, but for the needs of just a few under the guise of religion, worship, and commitment. And Jesus doesn't ignore it. Jesus actually does something about it. And when we read scripture, oh my goodness, it's shock horror. Jesus actually does something about it and seizes our attention. The very people, the temple priests who were supposed to be serving the people and caring from them, was fleecing them left, right, and center. The temple had become more like a first century theme park like no other. Get inside and we'll charge you double. Sorry if you run a theme park.

But that's the way it happens. People had come to experience the sense of God. And what were they met with? All they were met with was greed and injustice and deceit. The law, the law, the law required people to come and make a sacrifice. And the sacrifice doesn't, it's, you brought things which were according to your financial status. But still it was costly. And in those days, if you brought, if you brought a pair of doves, that would cost you roughly in today's money about 4p. But in their money, that was a week's wages. So effectively, that was a huge sacrifice. But of course, inside the temple, surprise, surprise, these doves were being sold for 75p. But of course, when you came, you were being charged an outrageous price for giving a large cut, not only to, not to the Lord, you were giving it actually to the temple authorities, to the priests, and those were taking a rake off from it.

Franchised church. These people were paying to actually be within the temple courts to take their rake off from what it was. And here's the sting. Even if you brought your own doves. So I've brought my own doves from home. You've guessed it. There was a temple inspection tax. And so there was inspectors inside the temple that would charge you a penny to inspect whether your doves were good enough for sacrifice. And you've guessed it again. Not many got through. So you had to buy the more expensive ones that were expensive ones that were on the inside. And also as well, there wasn't all.

[5 : 1 4] Sounds like a manifesto, doesn't it? You may have heard of those recently. There's even more. What happened was, is your well-earned money that you have brought to pay the temple taxes, because there was temple taxes, apart from your sacrifice, was you couldn't accept your

money inside of the temple.

Because your money wasn't good enough. It was unclean. So you could only use temple money. And you've guessed it. Inside there were money changers to move your money into temple money, of which there was another tax as well. It's no wonder really that tax collectors didn't get a trust pilot five star. And that they don't really get a good write-up within scripture. The whole thing was verging on corruption. And Jesus couldn't bear to see those whom he loved treated in this way and deceived his children misused.

God's wrath is something that we fail to major on, maybe in evangelical circles. What would Jesus do? What would Jesus do? Well, would Jesus give us a nice cuddle and a hug?

Oh, isn't he loving? But no, Jesus saw injustice and decided this day enough was enough. And he had to seize people's attention because God doesn't ignore injustice and will act and often calls us to come and challenge the injustice that we see. So it's important in scripture to look back as we think about this idea of the prophetic of what Jesus was doing within the context of this scripture. The prophets who had again and again and again, as you read the Old Testament, had remind God's people of where they had gone wrong, of where they actually weren't engaging with the message that they were giving.

[7 : 31] And the temple authorities again had failed time and time and time again to engage with what was the message of God.

And in our scripture, Jesus draws not only on past prophecy, which of course he would have known and the people would have learned, but he also gives this prophecy that the temple would fall within three days.

All four gospels record this event. This was obviously a significant event in Jesus's ministry, but what does it say for us today? What would Jesus do in prophecy and moving in the prophetic? You see, way back, Malachi, when you read the book of Malachi, Malachi was telling people, you're bringing God your second best. And I don't know about you, when I read that, when I read that for myself, I often think, Lord, am I bringing you my second best in my time, in my gifting, in the way in which I use my life?

Why am I not bringing you the first fruits of what I do and how I live my life? How am I doing that? Can I do that more and more? No wonder the chief priests and the scribes who heard Jesus's teaching and action squirmed and sought to destroy him.

[8 : 57] Because I would suggest that the majority of those that were around Jesus and heard this and watched this event were saying, yeah, too true.

Come on, let's bring this on, more of this, because we need somebody to stand with us and for us. No wonder the authorities saw Jesus as such a threat.

And in the gospel reading, in the same incident, Mark fuses together Isaiah and Jeremiah, and he was teaching them and saying to them, is it not written, as Jesus says, is this not written, that my house should be called a house of prayer for all the nations?

But you have made a den of robbers. My goodness, say it as it is, rather than hedge your own. Jesus is drawing on that prophetic message from the past to say it in the here and now.

What is Jesus saying to us to give the highest message to a waiting world in the here and now? What is that message that we have today to share with our friends and our families into a waiting world?

[10 : 09] The first quotation comes from Isaiah 56, which belongs to Isaiah's vision of a restored Jerusalem. He wanted to see this coming, this opportunity.

And in Isaiah, backwards and forwards all the time, Isaiah is pointing to this coming king, this king who will come, this person who will come and restore all things and bring justice.

Jesus is clearing the temple for all people, for you and me and for all people. Praise God that we are here and able to worship.

In Isaiah 7, 1, in the passage, God instructs Jeremiah to stand at the gate of the God's house and deliver a scathing denunciation.

This is way back before Jesus comes. Thus says the Lord of hosts, amend your ways and your deeds and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words.

[11 : 16] This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. Saying it three times, there is a reminder that this is about God.

This is what we come for. This is what it's about. And you know, what do you think is the vital elements? What do you consider the vital elements of being in church today?

So often we've focused on mission, rightly. We've focused on great teaching. We've also focused on pastoral care, looking after each other.

But where somehow did we lose moving in the prophetic? Because the prophetic is so important. Words may be that stir us and engage us, that seize people's attention.

That grabs people. You know, do we listen for the prophetic word of God? Do we, I think in these turbulent times, times where the Church of England, you know, for personally from a denomination, I feel the Church of England is being led in a very dangerous direction at the moment.

[12:27] Maybe we need to return to scripture and listen to the word of God to bring us back to a place where we are safe and we know that Jesus is known and held and scripture is upheld.

I recall many years ago in a church, there was a very, very prayerful lady who will know who she is. And this message that was brought to this church, the church basically, she brought a prophetic word that came through prayer and to repent, for the church to repent as a church that would have been wrapped in a critical spirit.

Honestly, this prophetic word was absolutely spot on. And this word, if you'd went to a church meeting, if you went to a church AGM, it was like a bloodbath, I can tell you.

You know, people would sit on either side of the church and not talk to each other. And that was just the leader's wives. You know? Well, sadly, she brought this amazing prophetic word, really courageous, and bringing that to the leadership, she was sent packing.

[13:47] Leadership didn't want to acknowledge it, didn't want to accept it, didn't want to know it. I'll tell you, that prophetic word is as fresh today as the day that it was given. For a church that hasn't seen growth, hasn't seen a healing, hasn't seen a repentance, and hasn't come back and repented and broken the critical spirit.

You know, come back to the Lord, kneel, repent, put on sackcloth, whatever it needs, but listen to the word of God to come back. What does it take for people to listen?

That's what was in the heart of the scripture today. We may get shocked that Jesus turned over a few tables. What does it take for people to listen? Because sometimes it has to be that stark for people to understand.

They prophesied that a saviour would come. He had come. He had come. He was there, right in front of them. Isaiah 42, Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one, in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not falter or be discouraged. He will not falter or be discouraged.

[15:05] If there's one thing to take from us today, he will not falter or be discouraged until he establishes justice on earth.

And we are part of that. The list goes on and on. I can read the list. The Messiah would be given vinegar to drink on the cross.

Psalms 69 came true. The Messiah would be mocked and ridiculed. Psalm 22, it came true. The Messiah's bones would not be broken.

Psalms 34, it came true. The Messiah would be buried with the rich. Isaiah 53, it came true. It says that the Messiah would speak in parables.

It says that in Isaiah, it came true. The list goes on and on and on. We need to move more and more in the prophetic people.

[16:02] We need to listen more and more to the word of God. Jesus' words would invoke the understanding of Jeremiah's wider context, this criticism and his prophecy of a future temple and the way it should be.

Jesus' actions, both inside and outside of the temple, were very clear demonstrations of what it would be. Again, Jesus talked about trees and fruit, those that would bear fruit and those that didn't. He was very clear in his wording and people understood. People saw it. People knew what he was talking about within the context, but the temple didn't.

The leaders in charge of God's chosen people just didn't get it. So the question for us this morning is, what's the significance of this scripture?

What's there for us? Jesus taught and prophesied about three days and rebuilding the temple. He did it. And we see it.

[17 : 06] Because it's about the cross once and for all. It was all about the cross. The disciples in our reading got it after the event.

Yeah, yeah, we get now the three days. We get exactly what he was talking about. This rebuilding. This is what it's going to be. Jesus crucified, died and buried and raised again for us. For us. Did somebody say hallelujah? I think they did. You know, the temple curtain was torn in two. We see the significance of things being exposed, things being brought into the light, being shown for what they are.

New life, not just for a few, but for all. Not just for the few. What would Jesus do? Everything that was said and prophesied about him.

That's what he does. You know, people who say, oh, I don't bother with the Old Testament anymore. You're missing the story. The old looks to the new.

[18 : 14] The new looks to the old. It measures up. It is the truth. What would Jesus do? Jesus came to fulfill his promise to each and everyone who turns to him and receives salvation in his word.

How do we respond to such love? How do we respond to prophecy? How do we respond to the sheer obvious and gracious action spoken down the years and fulfilled through Jesus Christ? How do we do that? How do we do that? We give our lives. Because it's worth it. The disciples saw it.

The disciples were so empowered by this that they had known. They had known the scriptures. They knew the prophecy. They knew the prophecy. And they went out and they prophesied over people.

What seizes people's attention for you today? As we go out and share God's love with people, I've never really argued anybody into the kingdom.

[19 : 20] I don't know whether you have. You know, I find it's... Some people want to do that. But when people start seeing signs and wonders and words given to them, it seizes their attention.

Maybe, maybe, maybe we're in a season where we're being called into a season more and more as a prophetic church to seize people's attention with words and messages and scripture.

Maybe it's time to hold fast to the words of scripture, to hold fast to the prophecy that was given, the prophecy that we know is true as we move forward, to the truth revealed in his holy word, to turn some tables of those who would seek to weaken God's will and bring undue influence in our church to rewrite or try to rewrite the truths.

Maybe a time to stand alongside Jesus in his truth as we dispel this woke culture.

But most of all, as I was reading this, I thought, Jesus said, I am the light of the world. And what did he do that day?

[20 : 47] In turning a few tables, he shone the light into the darkness. And people saw it for what it was. People saw it for what it was.

Jesus said, I am the light of the world. Very truly, said Jesus, I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but is crossed over from death to life.

Oh, what a savior. Oh, what a savior. So what tables need to be turned?

What tables do we need to turn in our own lives? What tables do we need to turn over where we're seeing injustice at the moment? Where do we need to speak into?

Where do we need to stand? Praise God that this is our gift. Praise God that this is our promise.

Praise God that this is our hope in our message, our message to a waiting world.

[22 : 04] Jesus is for all people and certainly for justice. And the people said? Amen. Amen.

Worship team, would you like to come up?

Should we just pray together? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord, as we listen to your word, would you help us to share that with others?

Lord, would we move more and more in the sense of the prophetic? Would you give us words and pictures for people? Lord, would you give us words and pictures for people, Lord, that encourage them and build them up in the everyday?

And Lord, where we have turned our eyes away from you, would you turn our eyes back to you?

Giver of hope, giver of life, bringer of light, bringer of justice.

Holy Spirit, would you come now and would you encourage your church? Empower us and encourage us, enthuse us and excite us, we pray. In the power of your Holy Spirit and of your word.

[23 : 29] Amen. Amen. Thanks, Tim.