Intro to Prophets (Old Testament Figures)

Did Jesus wait to earn the right to speak? A case study through Luke

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, May 1, 2022
PASSAGES	Jeremiah 8:11; Luke 12:49-53; Jeremiah 20:9; Acts 4:12-20; Luke 5:27-32; Luke 9:57-62; Luke 19:1-10; Acts 3:15-19
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:09:44 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The prophets are hard for us because they said difficult things to strangers, countrymen and foreign nations alike. We assume truth has to be earned through relationship first – but a walk through Luke shows Jesus and his followers did not live that way. The gospel is objectively true and good, worth telling anyone, and lifting Jesus up as he really is will sometimes be prickly.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Last week's testimonies cost the speakers something and nourished everyone. Something God has put on your heart may take the same bravery.
- The prophets were mocked and assaulted because they refused to say "peace, peace" when there was no peace.
- "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" is a principle we never apply to doctors or electricians – only to truths we have stopped believing are objective.
- Read story by story, Luke's Jesus rarely builds relational equity before getting spiritual. He calls, confronts, warns and invites from the first moment.

- Jesus said plainly he came to bring division – not by being mean, but because revealing who he is divides people.
- The early church kept speaking to rulers and commoners alike: "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."
- Truth is not earned by the speaker's character. Appealing to someone on the basis of what is true honours them more than building relational capital to win them over.

▶ 1:10:19

With many of Hope's women away on retreat, Matt prayed for them and then made a point from the week before. Testimony Sunday had clearly struck a chord – he could tell from the responses and even the YouTube view counts – and it had not been easy for the three who spoke.

The cost of what some give

▶ 1:11:04

"Something that was costly to some benefited everyone else." Matt said you could apply that to tithing, but he meant more: a ministry God has put on your heart, leading a small group, starting an initiative. Consider how a community benefits when the personal sacrifice of some is engaged instead of hidden. "It took bravery to do what they did, but we're all glad they did it." It is hard to imagine on this side of it, he said. Think about it.

Why the prophets are hard

▶ 1:12:42

After five weeks away for Good Friday, Palm Sunday, Easter and Testimony Sunday, the Old Testament series was returning to the major prophets – towering figures like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Hosea – at a bird's-eye pace that, Matt promised, would not do them justice. They are difficult partly because they said so many kinds of things: blessings, woes, calls to repentance, to Israel and Judah and their leaders and to other nations too. And for that they were mocked and assaulted, to the point that Jeremiah wanted to quit.

▶ 1:13:49

> "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace."
>
> JEREMIAH 8:11 ↗

Imagine living in Judah, hearing the official prophets and priests say "peace, peace," remembering how God always provided for your forefathers – and then this other guy doing weird things and saying no, there is no peace. "You think, eh, I can make fun of him."

▶ 1:15:22

If Isaiah, Jeremiah and Hosea were teleported to the present and we could hang out with them, Matt suspects we would find it hard to embrace them as brothers, let alone imitate them. The prevailing attitude is summed up in a familiar line: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Invest in relationship first, kindly and in a unifying way; only then share a difficult but necessary truth.

▶ 1:16:21

Oddly, we apply that to no other profession. "For my doctor, I don't care if he cares about me. I just want to know what that lab result looked like." Same with electricians, plumbers and engineers – anywhere there are objectively true things. We apply it to ourselves because "we have abdicated our claim to truth" and now treat truth as relationally established. So it is hard to "drop a J-bomb" on a stranger, let alone anything contrarian. And then there is the false dichotomy: those are Old Testament prophets; we're into the Jesus stuff now.

A case study: did Jesus live by that principle?

▶ 1:17:46

Fine, Matt said – did Jesus? Did he feel he had to "chum it up" with people first and get spiritual after building equity? Then, something he had never done before: a rapid walk through Luke, story by story, holding that one question in mind. He suggested we borrow the method at home with other questions: was Jesus "nice" by today's standards? Was he a unifying figure or a divisive one?

▶ 1:19:50

In Nazareth, reading Isaiah in his home synagogue among people who knew him (Luke 4): "I'm going to give this story a check." Teaching and casting out a demon in Capernaum: check. Preaching from a boat to crowds too large to know – but they came to him: maybe. Then he heals a leper and a paralytic and calls Levi with no sign of prior relationship (Luke 5:27–32): no.

▶ 1:21:44

On a Sabbath he knows he is being watched, so he has the man with the withered hand stand up where everyone can see and heals him, knowing it will trigger people (Luke 6:6–11): no. Beatitudes *and woes* to travelers from as far as Tyre and Sidon: no. A centurion's servant healed and a widow's son raised: "a nice solid maybe." The parable of the sower is "antithetical to the whole modern vibe" – a sower flinging seed everywhere like a kid with a bag of it (Luke 8:4–15).

▶ 1:23:39

The Gerasene man is restored to his right mind, asks to travel with Jesus, and is told instead, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you" (Luke 8:26–39) – a mixed bag, "and I'm not sure how comforted the pig farmers felt." Clearly Jesus cares more about spiritual well-being than the comfort of everyone around him.

▶ 1:24:07

By chapter 9 it is "getting out of hand": he sends twelve others to preach, heal, and shake the dust off their feet. He feeds five thousand, then tells followers to take up the cross and not be ashamed of him; he calls a crowd a faithless and twisted generation. To one who wants first to bury his father: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead" (Luke 9:57–62). In chapter 10 he sends seventy-two more – "not a mean-spirited thing," Matt stressed, just people proclaiming the kingdom and ready to wipe their feet – and pronounces woes on towns that saw miracles but did not repent (Luke 10:13–16). He expected repentance, not only healing. Then the good Samaritan: "Yes, that's the nice Jesus."

▶ 1:26:28

"I'm not making fun of any of the things Jesus is doing," he added, "but I do feel willing to make fun of our fake versions of Jesus." A woman blesses his mother; he answers, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:27–28). Then a string of woes to lawyers and Pharisees. In chapter 12 he warns a huge crowd to fear the one who can cast into hell, and to a man wanting help with an inheritance he says, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?... Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness" (Luke 12:13–15). Consider the lilies: check, that's nice. And then:

▶ 1:27:49

> "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!... Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."
>
> LUKE 12:49–53 ↗

Why say that explicitly? "Because he came to reveal himself, and that is inherently divisive." He unifies those who are in him; the phenomenon as a whole divides the world.

▶ 1:28:57

Told about the Galileans Pilate killed: “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1–5). Warned that Herod wants him dead: “Go and tell that fox…” – then, in the same breath, he laments over Jerusalem like a hen longing to gather her chicks (Luke 13:31–35). At a dinner party he corrects the guests scrambling for the best seats in front of everyone – “Jesus’s dinner party manners” – and tells a multitude to hate even their own lives for his sake (Luke 14:25–27). “Imagine him tweeting that.”

▶ 1:30:53

Lunch with Zacchaeus apparently “got spiritual right away” and ended in repentance (Luke 19:1–10). Object that Jesus spent most of his time in relationship with the disciples, and Matt agrees – “except do you remember how Jesus starts his relationship with each of the disciples? From the word go: follow me.”

And the early church?

▶ 1:31:28

Perhaps, then, Jesus is uniquely the Son of God and we should copy his early followers instead, with their shared meals and common life. So keep reading Luke’s second volume. Peter stands before a crowd and says, “You killed the Author of life… Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:15–19). Peter and John are arrested for stirring up trouble, “just like their master,” and insist there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Told not to teach in Jesus’ name, they answer:

▶ 1:32:32

> “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”
>
> ACTS 4:19–20 ↗

▶ 1:33:15

Jesus and his followers approached leaders and commoners, rich and very poor, Jews and Gentiles; Peter got spiritual right away in Cornelius’ house too. They were not choosing some people to be mean to and others to be nice to. “It’s always the same kingdom, but for some it sounds like a thing on which you can be broken and receive healing, and for others it feels like something under which you were crushed.” Always blessing and warning together.

Truth that simply is

▶ 1:33:57

For them the gospel was not a relationally established truth but an objective one, objectively good and worth sharing with anyone, "no matter what kind of a scumbag you are." The woman at the well with a poor reputation was immediately telling her whole town, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did" (John 4:29). The man who had terrorised families became a preacher the same day. "Truth wasn't relationally established, and it wasn't earned by their character. Truth was a thing that's just real, that you could talk about, like math."

▶ 1:34:28

He offered a "cringy" example: he is pro-life, and some say he cannot hold that view because he is a man. "Where in me is that truth or not? It's not in my hands or my feet. Is it a truth or not, regardless of who I am?" Making the right to speak something you earn, he said, degrades the value of the truth itself. The prophets' words were true because God said them, not because of Isaiah's or Jeremiah's inner worth.

▶ 1:35:59

And there is something creepy about the alternative. "Isn't it creepy that we would want to influence someone into believing something because we relationally coerce them? … Hi, why are you so nice to me? No reason, just wanted to develop a lot of relational capital with you right away. Can we talk later?" A person's dignity is enhanced when you appeal to them on the basis of a true thing.

▶ 1:36:38

Matt was clear he is not advocating meanness or being divisive on purpose. But no matter how kind you are, the Bible's words will get prickly, and that is not proof you are being unlike Christ. "A servant is not greater than his master" (John 15:20); if people loved and hated Jesus, whatever we repeat of his will meet the same response. "I would rather just be direct and honest: hey, here's the thing the Bible says."

Why this matters before the prophets

▶ 1:38:20

The reason for the whole exercise: "We have an unhealthy detachment from the Old Testament," and the prophets are the hardest section of it. Being prickly is a bad reason to dismiss them; if God said it, it is still Scripture and should not be kept under lock and key while we read the showy parts. Our role is to lift up Christ, who draws people to himself as he is lifted up (John 12:32) – lifted up as he really is.

Jesus spoke in parables to crowds but plainly to his disciples, which is also why the rest of the New Testament must be honoured: “they got the inside scoop and we didn’t.”

▶ 1:41:40

By modern standards the goal would be what Jeremiah’s priests did: “peace, peace,” with great concern for the hurt. Jeremiah was so tired of being mocked that he wanted to stop, and only kept going because the word burned in him:

> “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”
>
> JEREMIAH 20:9 ↗

▶ 1:42:10

Jeremiah could not help it; Peter and John could not help it; Paul said he could not help but preach (1 Corinthians 9:16). Seeing the true Lord of glory lifted up is worth it, and when you believe by the power of the Holy Spirit, that message just comes out of you. Which brought Matt back to where he began: there may be something inside you that takes bravery or vulnerability to get out. “Follow the Holy Spirit’s leading and lift up the Lord of glory as he really is. It might be hard, but it’s so worth it.” Next week, the prophets.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Jeremiah 8:11
- Luke 4:16–30
- Luke 5:27–32
- Luke 6:6–11
- Luke 8:4–15
- Luke 8:26–39
- Luke 9:57–62
- Luke 10:13–16
- Luke 11:27–28
- Luke 12:13–15
- Luke 12:49–53
- Luke 13:1–5
- Luke 13:31–35
- Luke 14:25–27
- Luke 19:1–10
- Acts 3:15–19
- Acts 4:12
- Acts 4:19–20
- John 4:29
- John 15:20
- John 12:32
- Jeremiah 20:9
- 1 Corinthians 9:16

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. What has God put on your heart that would cost you something to do, and how might others benefit if you did it?
2. Where have you lived by “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care,” and what has it helped or hindered?
3. Which story in Matt’s walk through Luke surprised you most, and what does it show about how Jesus treated people?
4. How would you tell the difference between being needlessly divisive and faithfully saying something the Bible says that people find prickly?
5. Try Matt’s method this week: pick a Gospel and one question about Jesus. What question will you ask, and what do you expect to find?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church’s governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope’s own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uv9QOvUM19Y&t=4184s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.