

SERMON SERIES:
GOD IS WITH US
Witnesses to His Coming

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The Witness of Prophecy (Isaiah 40:1-5; Matthew 1:18-23; 2:1-6)

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The Purpose of Prophecy

In the Old Testament we can find many writings that we call “Prophecies”, and people often search for the meaning of these “Prophecies”. So, why do people spend so much time in pursuing and seeking to understand them, and rejoice when they discover what they see as being the answer?

As we look at the purpose of prophecies in the Old Testament, I believe there are two reasons. **Firstly**, they are there to give us small glimpses of what we can expect to happen in the future. **Secondly**, they prepare us for what is to come.

Prophecies can be both positive and negative. The positive ones bring a sense of excitement and expectation and wishing it would happen “Now”, whereas the negative ones cause us to fear and tremble and to wonder how we might escape from the situation that is to come.

As we near the time we celebrate the birth of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, I would like to take us through some of the prophecies in the Old Testament, that speak directly to us about the coming of the Messiah.

The Progression of Prophecy

I like to call this “The Progression of Prophecy”. God, in His wisdom, has not given us the whole picture of His plan of salvation in one revelation. It is given over a couple of thousand years, with each little piece of information gradually being woven into the complete picture just like a jig-saw puzzle which many of us have been doing over the last twelve months. Each little piece in itself, doesn’t mean very much, but as each piece is put in its correct place, the image takes shape and ultimately, the complete picture is revealed. So, let’s see if we can create a complete picture.

To go back to the beginning, let’s go forward to the time after Jesus had been crucified, when two of His disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Suddenly, the risen Jesus joined them and started to reveal to them the prophecies concerning Himself in the

Old Testament, beginning with Moses and most probably from Genesis 3:15, which says: *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

Here God is talking to Satan and Eve stating, that because Adam and Eve had disobeyed His command and broken their relationship with Him, He was going to have to implement His plan of salvation, to restore the original relationship between Himself and mankind, and how He was going to do it.

Can you imagine what it must have been like as Jesus started to reveal to these men how God’s plan of salvation was to evolve? No wonder their hearts burned within them as the light began to dawn and understanding broke through.

As we move along, We find in Isaiah 7:14 that God says He will step in and take a hand by selecting a virgin, a young woman who had never been married, to carry the unborn Messiah. It says, *“The Lord himself will give you a sign, The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son, and will call him Immanuel”*. In this well-known prophecy, the “Son” will not only be born of a virgin but is “Immanuel” which means “God with us”.

As well as that, in Micah 5 verse 2 God specifies the location where this child, the Messiah, would be born. It reads *“But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old from ancient times”*. Here God was being very specific as there were two “Bethlehem’s” in existence at the time of Jesus birth. There was to be no doubt as to the place where He would be born, and when the wise men enquired of Herod where the new King would be born, the religious leaders came back with this prophecy, and the wise men found it exactly as was prophesied.

It’s interesting to note the language of the wise men, when they asked King Herod the where-abouts of the child they were seeking. The question was - *“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews”* (Matthew 2:2) This phrase implies a claim to deity – no human can be born a king but rather a prince. The statement that this child was born King of the Jews agrees with the prophecy in Micah 5:2 where it says of this child: *“Whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”* This could only refer to God’s timeless existence, consequently, this too infers the deity of the child.

Another familiar prophecy is found in Isaiah 9:6 where it says: *“For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace”*.

This prophecy was given about 700 years before the birth of Christ, and the attributes listed here show the supremacy and uniqueness of this child.

“Son” in this verse, is linked to the promise God gave to David in 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2:7 where God says that one of David’s descendants would remain on the throne of Israel for ever. This is why the Messiah had to be born of the tribe of Judah.

Another unique feature of this prophecy are the names given to this child which are called throne names. Each of them consists of two elements, unlike Old Testament personal names which consisted of one element only, like “Immanuel”.

“**Wonderful Counsellor**” points to the Messiah as King. As Wonderful Counsellor the coming Son of David will carry out a royal program that will cause all the world to marvel. He will guide, lead and counsel us in all righteousness and justice and in all circumstances, which will bring honour and glory to His name.

This awesome “**Mighty God**” has displayed His power in the creation of the amazing world we live in. Even though it is a fallen world where not everything is perfect, the way God has arranged things to work together is wonderful to behold.

“**Everlasting Father**” indicates that our Messiah is from everlasting to everlasting, the Alpha and the Omega, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and of His kingdom there will be no end.

In our war-torn world, the words “**Prince of Peace**” creates a picture of one who brings a state of tranquillity to us all. So, why is there so much unrest all around us? It is because the peace that is spoken of here, is not the worldly peace we desire, but the spiritual harmony brought about by an individual’s restoration with God. This has been achieved by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and now we can enjoy our new relationship of peace with God (Romans 5:1)

Another prophecy is found in Isaiah 40:3-5 where we are told that, before the Messiah comes, He would send someone to prepare the way for Him. These verses say:

A voice of one calling: in the desert prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it.

All of these prophecies bring a sense of joy and anticipation as we study them and wait for their fulfilment. But there are some prophecies which bring shame and sadness to mind.

The prophecies concerning Jesus trial found in Isaiah 53:2,3,7 are a couple of these. In verses 2 and 3 it says-

*For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Fancy having these words written about the Son of God, the One who would give His life so that we could have life in all its fulness. So, why is he described this way, and could they possibly be right?

Now in verse 7 we find that Jesus response to His affliction would be very unusual. Most people would respond with aggression or anger or denial, but these words indicate that His response to the accusations made against Him would be quite different. They read:

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth*

There are many more prophecies that we could look at, but time does not allow for this, so let's move on to the fulfillment of prophecies.

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

In the first prophecy we looked at, God was foreshadowing His plan of salvation for all mankind. He was speaking to Satan and Eve concerning His plan and its final outcome. Sin had entered the world by Adam and Eve's disobedience and ruined the relationship that He had with His creation, and He knew that man was incapable of restoring that relationship. So, He was going to implement His plan of salvation that would ultimately see the defeat of Satan.

The phrase *"you will strike His heel"* refers to Satan's repeated attempts to defeat Christ during His life on earth. In Matthew 4:1-11, we see how Satan attempted to thwart God's plan by tempting Jesus in the wilderness, yet without success.

"He will crush your head" foreshadows Satan's defeat when Christ rose from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15: 55 it says, *"Where O death is your victory, Where O death is your Sting"*. When Adam and Eve sinned, death entered the world. When Christ arose from the dead, He broke the power of sin and death.

The prophecy concerning the place where the baby would be born and the uniqueness of the person who would give birth to God's chosen one, are recorded in Luke 2:4-7 and Matthew 1:22 which say:

So Joseph went up ... to Judea to Bethlehem, the town of David ... He went there to register with Mary, who was.... expecting a child. While they were there.... She gave birth to her first born, a son.

And - All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet; "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel – which means God with us"

These verses show the preciseness with which the prophecies, made hundreds of years before, were fulfilled.

Concerning the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3-5, The fulfillment is recorded in John 1:22. The Priests and Levites had come out from Jerusalem into the desert to question John the Baptist as to who he was because of the way he was preaching. His reply was to quote Isaiah 40:3 *"I am the voice of one calling in the desert 'Make straight the way for the Lord'."* Another perfect fulfillment of a prophecy made 700 years before it took place.

The fulfillment of the prophecies in Isaiah 53 can be found in Mark 15:17-19. Here it tells how the Roman soldiers placed a crown of thorns on Jesus' head, beat Him over the head with a staff and spat on Him. When you think of the physical appearance of Christ after He had been beaten, spat upon, flogged, and with blood running down His face and back from the crown of thorns placed on His head, no wonder people didn't want to look at Him and didn't want to have anything to do with Him. And also, in Mark 15:4- 5, it confirms the

prophecy in Isaiah 53:7 where He refused to answer His accusers which was a very unusual response.

All the prophecies we have looked at this morning have been fulfilled precisely as predicted in every detail.

The Future in Prophecy

With all we have seen of these prophecies today and the fulfillment of them, it gives us confidence to trust God's word in every way. In all His prophecies, He can be trusted to do what He says He will do.

In the New Testament, we have a number of prophecies and I would like to share one that I am looking forward to being fulfilled. It is in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 which says:

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep, for the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

With the certain knowledge of fulfillment that we have seen with other prophecies, it is with much excitement that we, who are in Christ, can look forward to the fulfillment of this prophecy and meeting our Saviour face to face.