

# PROPHETIC PREACHING

then and now

by

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## CHAPTER SIX

### PROCLAIMING THE LOVE OF GOD

**"For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him, As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us, Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Psalm 103:11-13).**

Love is the greatest thing in the world, declared Henry Drummond in his delightful discussion of I Corinthians 13, Paul's matchless ode on love. Love also is the greatest thing in Heaven, for GOD is love (I John 4:8). Love begins with GOD, and all true love is derived from him. No message which comes from GOD is complete without a winsome and persuasive presentation of some truth about the everlasting love of the Heavenly Father.

JESUS summed up in the one word love the teachings of Moses and the other prophets about the Heaven-approved relations of men toward GOD and of men toward other men (Matthew 22:37-40; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18, 34). Preaching the doctrine of the boundless and everlasting love of GOD the Father will be used of the Holy Spirit to bring men to repentance, to inspire faith, to encourage holiness, and to spread happiness in human hearts. What the Saviour preached in fullest perfection the prophets preached with growing perception and increasing power.

#### **Preaching the Love of GOD**

A preacher can herald a Gospel of forgiveness and love, if he is living near to the heart of the GOD of love. That is why the preaching prophets of Old Testament times were so dynamic. It would be enlightening indeed to listen in on an old-fashioned testimony meeting where each prophet answered the question, "Why were you so concerned to lead people into intimate fellowship with GOD, and where did you get the content of your sermons which you preached with such authoritativeness?" One can imagine some of the answers.

While Moses was in Pharaoh's court, he saw the oppression of his people by a pagan nation of people who knew nothing about love. Their pagan religions only led them to become unspeakably cruel toward the enslaved Israelites. During forty years of intimate communion with GOD while he was in the wilderness, Moses felt with an ever-increasing conviction that GOD loved his people (Exodus 3:7-9). He felt that GOD had the jealousy of true love, and his beloved

should return his love with heart, soul and might (Deuteronomy 6:5, 15).

It soon dawned upon him that if GOD loved his people so, it obligated them to love their fellowmen - even to love strangers as they loved themselves. So Moses returned to Egypt with a heavenly fire in his heart and a heavenly message on his tongue. Until his dying day he preached, "**The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms**" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Where did Hosea get materials for his sermons? The fountain source of his preaching was the love of GOD.

Out of a tragic experience with the frailty of human love he found that only in GOD does one find a love from which nothing can separate us (Romans 8:38-39). He married Gomer, the sweetheart of his youth, and was a devoted husband to her. But alas, to his soul-crushing sorrow, she was unfaithful to him. Although she went to the depths of infidelity and depravity, Hosea could not shake off his undying love for her. He forgave her. He took her out of her debauchery; he took her back to his heart and home. When life around him was darker than midnight, he looked toward Heaven and saw a light. It was the face of GOD, bright with forgiving grace and radiant with yearning love. He could never forget that look.

Hosea knew that the people of his nation were as unfaithful to his loving GOD as his adulterous wife had been to him (Hosea 4:12-13; 7:3-8). Yet, GOD taught him that if he could love and forgive Gomer, surely the Lord could love an unfaithful people and forgive those who repent.

The compassionate prophet cried out persuasively that GOD is love, that GOD would forgive their gross unfaithfulness, if they would return unto the Lord (Hosea 6:1).

He tried to touch their hearts by reminding them how GOD loved them when Israel was a young nation.

GOD so:

- graciously led Israel out of Egypt,
- taught them like teaching a baby to walk,
- healed them of their diseases,
- drew them with the cords of love (Hosea 11:4).

Hosea preached to them about the gracious Lord whose heart was breaking for them, who was saying, "**How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? . . . I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man**" (Hosea 11:8, 9).

Amid the gloom that fell when King Uzziah died, Isaiah went into the sanctuary to seek the light (Isaiah 6:1-8). Behold, he saw the Lord of hosts, the King of kings. Isaiah was never the same after that experience. When he saw GOD's glory, he confessed his sins.

In infinite grace GOD forgave the prophet's sin and cleansed him from his iniquity. Thereafter, Isaiah preached that the Lord was a GOD of grace and love,

- giving strength to the needy,
- refuge from the storms,
- shade in which to hide from burning suns,
- feasts for the famished.
- He promised that GOD would wipe away the tears from the eyes of those who sorrow and would swallow up death in victory (Isaiah 25).

## GOD MADE ISAIAH THE MAN GOD WANTED HIM TO BE!

Jeremiah had no miraculous vision of GOD and his seraphim, such as Isaiah experienced. While he was in his priestly father's house at Anathoth, near Jerusalem, he read the soul-stirring messages of Hosea declaring in soft and appealing words that GOD hates sin violently but that he loves sinners tenderly. The tender-hearted Jeremiah became conscious of the Divine Presence speaking to him like one friend to another. GOD was calling him to prophesy to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5-10). His shrinking soul trembled when GOD commissioned him to attack the citadels of sin, to root up the seed of iniquity, to tear down the temples of idolatry, and to prophesy the doom of his beloved nation. That would have been intolerable to him but for the fact that GOD also commissioned him to build and to plant. He joyously announced to Judah that GOD said of her people, **"Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee . . . Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? . . . I will surely have mercy on him"** (Jeremiah 31:3, 20).

When Isaiah was prophesying, the people of Judah were dejected and despairing, enduring exile from their beloved Jerusalem and bondage to the Babylonians. They were bowed down in discouragement, sitting down and weeping beside the rivers and canals of that country (Psalm 137). The prophet's heart was almost breaking in sympathy. In seeking a way of comfort and salvation for them, Isaiah turned to GOD. In the night he, through faith, saw a light. Through divine revelation he saw salvation both for the nation and for individuals, a salvation made possible through the Suffering Servant of the Lord. Through the telescope of faith he saw the Suffering Servant wounded for men's transgressions; he saw that by His stripes men could be healed of their sin debt (Isaiah 49-53).

The Spirit of GOD commissioned Isaiah to preach the good news of the Suffering Servant's love.

- he preached the Gospel of salvation for the poor.
- he proclaimed deliverance to those in spiritual bondage as well as to those in physical slavery.
- he joyously promised power to open the eyes which are blind to heavenly truth.
- he announced to the people that the day of salvation was already there (Isaiah 61:1-2; 62:11).

The prophets one and all were preachers of theology, the theology of a GOD of love and forgiveness. Moses preached this Gospel, Micah heralded it forcefully, Isaiah proclaimed it eloquently, Jeremiah sobbed it at one breath and shouted it at the next, Hosea sweetened it, and Isaiah sang it in poetic beauty. Who follows in their train?

## Preaching CHRIST, GOD's Gift of Love

GOD so loved that he gave. By peering into the future by faith in the GOD with whom they had daily fellowship, the prophets preached CHRIST JESUS as Saviour, the unspeakable gift of GOD's love. What else could be the central theme of preaching today, if it is to be prophetic preaching? The coming Messiah was to the Gospel of the prophets like the central nerve that runs through the spinal column, like the melody of a song which may be played with a multiplicity of variations, like the light of the sun of which all other lights are but reflections. **"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself"** (Luke 24:27).

The prophets promised in their sermons that the Messiah would come.

Moses said, **"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken"** (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Samuel (II Samuel 7:12) and Isaiah (11:1) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 23:5) each predicted that the Messiah would be born of the line of David.

Micah announced that the Saviour would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Isaiah declared that it was the purpose of GOD to establish a kingdom of righteousness which would be ruled by the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 2:2-5). He would be born of a virgin, and his name would be Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), Wonderful Counselor, Mighty GOD, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:16). He would usher in a social order of righteousness and peace (Isaiah 11:1-9).

Jeremiah preached in great spiritual power about salvation through the coming Messiah. He was quite specific in foretelling many details about JESUS. He saw that the love of GOD was to be expressed through the righteous branch which GOD would raise up from the family tree of David (Jeremiah 23:5), and through a new covenant or contract about salvation which GOD would make (Jeremiah 31:31-32). JESUS explained this when he said at the institution of the Lord's Supper, **"This cup is the new testament [covenant] in my blood"** (I Corinthians 11:25).

Zechariah held aloft the torch of hope, and it burned with a new brightness. He affirmed that the Messiah would have priestly powers, making atonement for sins (Zechariah 6:12-13). He foretold that the Messiah would come victoriously but humbly, not riding a war horse like a military victor but riding the colt of an ass like an ambassador of peace (Zechariah 9:9).

Malachi foretold that the Messiah would have a forerunner (whom JESUS identified as John the Baptist), and that the Sun of righteousness would rise with healing in his wings (Malachi 3:1; 4:2).

It was Isaiah who rose to the loftiest heights of spiritual perception about the coming Messiah, who heralded his coming with the noblest eloquence and most heart-melting exhortation. He pictured in poetic but poignant language the Messiah's vicarious suffering for the iniquities and transgressions of sinful men.

If CHRIST is taken out of preaching, it deteriorates into mere social and ethical moralizations, at

best. It loses the authority of the prophet's **"Thus saith the Lord."** Take CHRIST out of a prophet's sermons and they will lose the power of the Holy Spirit (John 16:14), they will lose their dynamic appeal (John 12:22), and they will fade like a feeble cry in the wind.

### **Preaching the Doctrines of Grace**

Great preaching is not possible unless it proclaims great doctrines that grow out of the truth about a GOD of righteousness and love. Super-sensationalism or hyper-emotionalism in preaching always fails to meet the needs of the human heart.

A sin-burdened heart yearns for grace. The doctrine of the love of GOD is the root from which the flowers of all the doctrines of grace come. The theological doctrines about salvation - the doctrines of grace - were the steel framework on which the sermons of the prophets were built. Doctrinal truth about GOD's grace is the spinal column of prophetic preaching; moral and social righteousness is the flesh and blood of it; CHRIST is the heartbeat of it. A healthy body requires all three.

Out of the doctrine of the love of GOD flows the doctrines of conviction for sin, forgiveness conditioned on repentance, justification through faith, regeneration, sanctification, glorification, and other doctrines about the work of GOD in the human heart.

Conviction for sin was preached by all the prophets from Amos to Zechariah, that is, "from A to Z." Repentance was demanded by all from Moses to Malachi, from Jeremiah to John the Baptist. Regeneration, according to a new covenant of grace which was to be written in the hearts of individual men, was preached and promised by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Ezekiel promised a new heart and a new spirit, as he pathetically implored the people to cast off their sins and not to die in them (Ezekiel 18:31-32). Sanctification was constantly the preaching theme of those men who yearned to see their beloved people adhere to the GOD of their fathers. Daniel sought to turn the eyes of the people heavenward for glorification:

**"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever"** (Daniel 12:2-3).

The world does not hear enough of that kind of preaching, and it sorely needs it. Sinful men cannot pass from death unto life without repentance for sin, the forgiveness of GOD, and being transformed into His likeness by regeneration through the Holy Spirit.

### **FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION**

1. Where did the various prophets first learn about GOD being a GOD of love? Moses? Hosea? Isaiah? Jeremiah?
2. Where else besides in the writing prophets do the Old Testament Scriptures teach about the Messiah?

3. At what times in Jewish history was the Messianic hope inflamed to the highest?
4. What mistaken ideas about the Messiah's coming and about his rule did JESUS have to overcome?
5. What was the all-inclusive concept and contribution to the world that JESUS came to give to men, which was the theme of his preaching from first to last?

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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