

## Jesus the prophet. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 18 November 2015.

This past Lord's Day, Linda and I travelled down to the home of Ian and Rebecca Rees near Tenby, to begin preparations for our coach trip to them in four weeks' time. In the evening, we attended the meeting which they hold weekly in Tenby itself. And in the course of that meeting we sang – not 'Amazing Grace' – but another of John Newton's famous hymns: 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear'. The fourth verse of that hymn speaks of the Lord Jesus as 'my Prophet, Priest and King'.

And it falls to me this morning to speak to you about the first of those titles – about 'Jesus the Prophet'.

If you are like me, you will be less familiar with that title than with many others given to Jesus, such as 'Saviour', 'the Christ', or 'the Son of God'. And yet, although we may not immediately associate our Lord with the title 'prophet', in point of fact that was the description which most readily sprang to many people's minds when He was here on earth.

I note first that it was the title used of Him by those who did not know Him at all well.

I suppose it hardly surprising that somebody like the man born blind to whom Jesus gave his sight should reply as he did to those who cross-questioned him, 'What do you say about Him, since He has opened your eyes?' 'He is', the onetime blind man answered, 'a prophet'.<sup>1</sup>

And it is even less surprising, I guess, that the woman who met Jesus beside the well in Samaria and whose past marital history Jesus was able to recite to her in detail should respond, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet'.<sup>2</sup>

But the description of Jesus as a 'prophet' sprang to the lips of many others also. We read, for instance, that, when He approached Jerusalem for the last time, on His way to His crucifixion and death, (and I quote) 'the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds replied, "This is Jesus *the prophet* from Nazareth of Galilee".<sup>3</sup> Indeed, we read that, just a short time after, although the chief priests and Pharisees then 'sought to arrest Him', they couldn't, for 'they feared the multitude, because they considered Him to be a prophet'.<sup>4</sup>

Not, of course, that the Jewish leaders themselves endorsed that view. On one occasion, our Lord was invited to the house of a Pharisee, by name Simon. While there, a woman entered who was a known social outcast, quite possibly a prostitute. Now, sincerely repentant, she proceeded to wash and to wipe the Saviour's feet. As you might expect, Simon was horrified, and, we are told, 'said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner"'.<sup>5</sup> But, oh yes, as He immediately proved, Jesus knew full well what sort of woman she *had been* – and what sort of man Simon *still* was!<sup>6</sup>

But the title of 'prophet' wasn't only used of Jesus by those who knew little of Him. It was also used by His own disciples. On the very day of our Lord's resurrection, two (then very dejected) disciples were making their way from Jerusalem to their home village of Emmaus, when the newly risen Lord joined them, and opened up what proved to be a fascinating conversation. I say 'fascinating', not least because, at that stage, the two disciples failed to recognise the Saviour, and proceeded to speak to their travelling companion – to the supposed 'stranger' – about Him; declaring Him to be, and I quote, 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, who our chief priests and rulers delivered up to be condemned to death, and crucified'.<sup>7</sup>

But the title of 'prophet' wasn't only used of Jesus by those who didn't know Him well and by His own disciples. It was a title which He used Himself.

One of His favourite sayings, which – in slightly different forms – He uttered on at least three separate occasions to explain His rejection by those of His own hometown and homeland, was 'a prophet has no honour in his own country'.<sup>8</sup> Note His unmistakable reference to Himself as 'a prophet'.

And we read that some of the Pharisees later attempted to lure Jesus away from Galilee and persuade Him to go to Jerusalem (where they believed He would be more in the power of the Jewish authorities) ... to lure Jesus away with the claim that Herod Antipas (whose jurisdiction included Galilee<sup>9</sup>) wanted to kill Him.<sup>10</sup> In response, Jesus assured them that He would not be hurried by them or by Herod, but that, following a brief period of continued activity, indeed He would then pursue His journey to Jerusalem ... to the city which historically almost held the monopoly for killing God's prophets<sup>11</sup>... adding that, and again I quote, 'it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem'.<sup>12</sup> And note once more please our Lord's clear reference to Himself as 'a prophet'.

And I note that, of those who did not know Him well, some readily described Him, not merely as 'a prophet', but as 'a *great* prophet' – and I have in mind the townspeople of Nain, who, following the raising back to life of the dead son of a widow then en route to his burial, were heard to exclaim that, 'a great prophet is risen up among us'.<sup>13</sup>

But, according to the New Testament, the Lord Jesus was not only 'a prophet', nor only 'a great prophet'; He was '*the Prophet*'. For when He was here, the Jewish people were still looking for the fulfilment of God's promise made to Moses some 1500 years before concerning the nation of Israel, 'I will raise up for them *a Prophet like you* from among their brethren, and will put my words in His mouth'.<sup>14</sup>

And, because of this expectation, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John the Baptist, 'Who are you?' they specifically enquired, 'Are you *the Prophet*?' – to which he gave a firm and resounding, 'No!'<sup>15</sup> – pointing them to the One who was about to come after him, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Much later, following our Lord's miraculous feeding of a vast multitude in Galilee with a meagre supply of five loaves and two fish, many of the people responded, 'This is indeed *the Prophet* who is to come into the world!'<sup>17</sup>

And later again – during the last day of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem – when Jesus called out His spectacular invitation, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink',<sup>18</sup> many of His hearers exclaimed, 'Truly this is *the Prophet*'.<sup>19</sup>

I think we can assume that, on these latter two occasions, it was because our Lord fed many Israelites in a wilderness situation much as Moses once had, and because He offered to provide living, spiritual water much as Moses had once provided physical water that the people immediately recognised in Him *the 'Prophet like' Moses* for whom the nation had long waited.

Indeed, not long after the Lord's resurrection and ascension to heaven, we hear the apostle Peter pointing out to a crowd in Jerusalem that – and I quote the name which Peter gave Him – 'Jesus Christ' ... that 'Jesus Christ' was the fulfilment of that which – and I quote Peter again – 'Moses truly said to the fathers, "The Lord your God shall raise up a Prophet to you from among your brethren like me'.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, there can be no doubt that, according to the New Testament, the Lord Jesus can be accurately described, not only as 'a prophet', and, indeed, as '*a great prophet*', but (surpassing all other prophets) as distinctively '*the Prophet*'.

And yet, we rejoice to know this morning that He was – and is – so much more. For He came into the world, not only to be '*a prophet*' – nor even only to be '*the Prophet*' – to the end that He might *reveal God to men*, but, even more importantly for us sinners, He came into the world to be a Saviour to the end that He might *bring men to God*.

I leave therefore the last word with the apostle Peter, who once wrote to assure persecuted Christians of his day that 'Christ ... suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, *that He might bring us to God*'.<sup>21</sup>

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> John 9. 17.

<sup>2</sup> John 4. 19. We often find in the Old Testament that God's prophets were given to know God's secrets, 1 Kings 14. 1-6; 2 Kings 4. 27; 5. 25-26; 6. 8-12. cf Amos 3. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 21. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 21. 46.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 7. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Simon didn't know either the Saviour or the woman. To Simon, He was no prophet, and she was only 'a sinner', whereas, in truth, Jesus was more than a prophet (for He could forgive sins) and she was now a forgiven sinner. Our Lord revealed to Simon immediately that He was indeed, at the least, 'a prophet' ... both by answering Simon's unspoken challenge, and by informing him that He knew not only that the woman's sins were many, but that, on account of her faith in Him, they had been forgiven – and that this was the reason she 'loved much', as she had demonstrated by her actions, Luke 7. 47-50.

Interestingly, in the case of the woman with the discharge of blood, which followed soon after, Luke makes it clear that our Lord did indeed know who the woman was who 'touched Him', Luke 8. 47. (The Lord's question in verse 45 doesn't necessarily mean that He was ignorant of the woman's identity – only that it was His way of singling her out.). Interestingly also, whereas Simon the Pharisee expected Jesus (if a prophet) to know who it was that touched Him, as we read, Simon Peter (who knew Jesus to be much more than a prophet) didn't expect Jesus to know who it was that touched Him. And I note that the encounters of these two women with our Lord ended in exactly the same way ... with Him addressing both with the very same words, 'your faith has saved you; go in peace' – Luke 7. 50; 8. 48, the literal translation in both cases.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 24. 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> John 6. 44; Luke 4. 24; Mark 6. 4. D. A. Carson comments on John 6. 44 that the most likely 'interpretation identifies *patris* with Galilee—indeed, not just with Galilee, but with Galilee as it represents Jewish soil over against Samaritan soil. Jesus' 'own country', then, is Galilee and Judea, Jewish turf, as opposed to Samaria, from which he has just come. This obviously suits the immediate context; there is no need to pit Galilee (v. 45) against Judea, not mentioned since 4:3. In Samaria Jesus has just enjoyed his first unqualified, unopposed, and open-hearted success. Now he returns to his own people (cf. 1:11), and, consistent with the pattern developed so far, the response is at best ambiguous. Although in John 2 his disciples put their faith in him (2:11), nevertheless 'the Jews' challenge him (2:18, 20), his disciples do not understand him (2:22), and the many who appeared to believe in him were spurious converts (2:23–25) whose 'faith' was generated in no small measure by the miraculous signs he was doing (2:23)', *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar Commentary, pages 235-236.

<sup>9</sup> Herod Antipas ruled as 'tetrarch' of Galilee (Luke 3. 1; 23. 5-7) and Peraea.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 13. 31.

<sup>11</sup> See Luke 13. 34; cf. 1 Kings 18. 4, 13; 19. 10; Neh. 9. 26; Jer. 26. 20-23, and see Act 7. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Luke 13. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 7. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Deut. 18. 18; cf. v. 15.

<sup>15</sup> John 1. 19-21.

<sup>16</sup> John 1. 27.

<sup>17</sup> John 6. 14. Presumably the fact that our Lord had fed many Israelites in a wilderness area (Matt. 14. 15; Mark 6. 35) just as Moses had once fed many Israelites with manna in the wilderness prompted the people to associate Jesus with the Prophet like Moses.

<sup>18</sup> John 7. 37.

<sup>19</sup> John 7. 40. Presumably our Lord's claim to provide living water just as Moses had once provided physical water led some of the crowd to associate Jesus with the Prophet like Moses.

<sup>20</sup> Acts 3. 20-23.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Pet. 3. 18.