Do Prophets Still Exist? – Ephesians 4:7, 11-16
Argyle – 8/24/14 – You Asked for It!

Introduction to Scripture

Our topic today is, “Do prophets still exist?” We are all somewhat familiar with Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Daniel. Are there still prophets like that today? As our jumping off point for this study we are going to look at Paul’s classic teaching on the church in Ephesians 4. (Read) (Pray)

Before we get to the question of whether prophets exist today, I want to point out two amazing things about God that provide background to our study on prophets.

God Speaks to His People

The first amazing thing about God is that he speaks to his people. The author of Hebrews wrote, “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”(Hebrews 1:1) Through Jesus, through the prophets and through the apostles, God has spoken to us and what he has had to say is recorded in the Bible. We have in our hands here the word of God.

We are so familiar with the concept of the Bible that we often fail to appreciate what an amazing thing it is that the Holy, Infinite Creator has gone to such great lengths to communicate with us sinful, finite creatures. And he has spoken to us in words and concepts we can understand. So, if we want to know
what God is like, it is right here in the Bible. If we want to know how we can interact with God and know him, it is right here in the Bible. If we want to know what we are created for, it is right here in the Bible. If we want to know how to best live our lives, it is right here in the Bible. If we want to know what is going to happen in the future, it is right here in the Bible. God speaks to his people. Amazing!

**God Works through His People**

The other amazing thing that I want to point out about God this morning is that he works through his people. Most of the time when God had a message for his people, he communicated that through one of the prophets or apostles. He could have used angels, which he did occasionally, or spoken directly like he did at Jesus’ baptism, but normally God spoke through a human being. Interestingly and amazingly, God does much of his work through his people. This Ephesians 4 passage along with ones in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12 and I Peter 2 list spiritual gifts that God has distributed to his people so that we can accomplish his work. He has given each Christian at least one spiritual gift - gifts like prophecy, teaching, service, healing, administration, giving, mercy and leadership. There are around 20 spiritual gifts named in the Bible that have been given to us so that we can fulfill the assignments that God has for us. God works through prophets and the rest of us to do his work. So it is very important that we discover, develop and deploy the spiritual gifts that God has given us. Be on the lookout for our spiritual
gifts basics class or let me know if you would like me to send you one of our LifeKeys workbooks that helps us identify our spiritual gifts. God works through us, his people. Amazing!

**Do Prophets Still Exist?**

Now to our question, “Do prophets still exist?” The short answer to this question is both “No” and “Yes.” The answer is “No” if we are talking about prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and the other canonical prophets. “Canon” refers to the list of books that were included in the Bible. So, canonical prophets are the ones whose writings are included in Scripture like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Amos and the others.

In Isaiah 6, Isaiah describes a vision in which he sees the Lord seated on a throne in the temple. He is overwhelmed by the holiness of God and his own sinfulness, but God sent a seraph, which is some kind of heavenly creature, to touch his mouth with a live coal to atone for his sin. Then Isaiah hears God ask, “Who shall I send? And who will go for us?” So Isaiah responded, “Here am I. Send me.” God said, “Go and tell the people...” and he gave Isaiah a message. And God gave Isaiah other messages and we have the record of those messages in the 66 chapters of the Book of Isaiah. There are warnings, promises and words of judgment. Isaiah also contains a number of prophecies about the coming Messiah.

Jeremiah is another one of God’s canonical prophets. In Jeremiah 1, we are told that “The word of the LORD came to him in the 13th year of Josiah, son of
Amon king of Judah... Jeremiah goes on in verse 4, “The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’” (Jeremiah 1:4-5) Jeremiah objected to this, but God assured him of his presence and touched his mouth, saying, “Now I have put my words in your mouth.” Jeremiah recorded the messages God gave him for the people and we can read them today to learn what God wants us to know.

So if we mean canonical prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah when we ask the question, “Do prophets still exist?” the answer is “No.” As Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser writes, “All agree that classical Old Testament prophecy and apostolic prophecy that delivered to us God’s authoritative Scriptures have ceased.” Kaiser goes on, however, to talk about a secondary type of Christian prophecy. That is where we want to turn our attention to next.

Paul in his lists of spiritual gifts in both Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12 lists the gift of prophecy along with leadership, teaching, speaking in tongues, service and all of the rest. In I Corinthians 12-14 he elaborates on the gift of prophecy. So in asking the question, “Do prophets till exist?”; if we mean are there prophets in the church today who receive a message from God in this secondary sense and pass it along to the people, then the answer is “Yes” and “Yes.” The answer is yes in that we all at times speak prophetically to one
another. And the answer is “Yes” in that there are some in the church who have the spiritual gift of prophecy.

So, what exactly is the gift of prophecy? Since the Bible doesn’t give us a definition, we are left to develop one from our observation of how prophets function in the Bible. A prophet is someone who receives a message from God and communicates it to others. We often think of prophets as predicting the future and that is certainly one aspect of prophecy. But the bulk of prophecy is simply the communicating of God’s message about their everyday lives to his people.

We have all done that at times. We have taken a message we’ve received from studying God’s word and communicated it to someone. And some people have been given a particular gift for doing this. This may sound a little like the gift of teaching to you, but the difference between teaching and prophecy can be seen in this graphic Kim has developed. (Play car section) As we often see with the Biblical prophets, the prophetic communication of God’s word often has a warning aspect to it. Folks with the gift of prophecy can often see future consequences that the rest of can’t.

So if we mean people with prophetic insights and the spiritual gift of prophecy when we ask the question, “Do prophets still exist?”, the answer is “Yes” and “Yes.”
What Do We Do with Prophets in the Church Today?

So, what do we do with prophets in the church today? How do we respond to that person who shares a word of warning from God’s word with us or those folks who by spiritual gifting do that for the church at large? First, we value them and second, we test what they have to say.

Days before the Germans launched the attack that became known as the Battle of the Bulge, a peasant woman reported to the American troops that there was a huge buildup of German troops just a few miles away. But the American intelligence officers wouldn’t listen to her. What she was telling them didn’t fit with their narrative of what was happening. They had come to believe that the German army was no longer capable of launching a major attack. So they ignored her. As a result our troops were caught totally off guard on December 16 when 200,000 German soldiers and 1000 German tanks poured into Belgium. In the Battle of the Bulge, the U.S. forces suffered the highest casualties of any operation during World War II.

Terri Legg who was one of the leaders of our Second Half Ministry Conference years ago talks about how difficult it is to have the gift of prophecy. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, people and churches don’t like to hear messages than may be contrary to what they think. And none of us likes to have someone tell us we are going in the wrong direction. Prophets are like the red warning light that pop up on the car dashboard or the “do not enter” sign on the
highway or the Surgeon General’s warning on a pack of cigarettes. These are valuable messages that we need to pay attention to. We need to value and affirm the prophets among us.

And we need to test what they have to say? Paul wrote in I Thessalonians, “Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.” (I Thessalonians 5:20-21) John wrote, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (I John 4:1) John Piper points out that those with the gift of prophecy are not immune from human error as the Biblical prophets were in their messages. Therefore, we need to test these modern day prophetic messages. The two main tests we apply to a prophetic message are: “Is it consistent with Scripture?” and “Does it point to Jesus as Lord?”

We desperately need prophets in the church today who help us apply God’s word in the broken world we live and minister in. Sometimes we can’t see clearly the consequences of the decisions we make or the direction we are headed in. So we need to value our prophets and carefully listen to and test their messages.

**Conclusion**

Do prophets still exist in the church today? What a great question!