

## The call of a prophet

### 1. The call

About 20 years ago, I was just going off to sleep, when I knew God wanted to speak with me. So I opened my spiritual ears, and this is what happened:-

“Son, I have a job for you.”

“Lord” I replied, “I already have a job.”

“I know, but I am calling you to a new one. I want you to be a prophet to the Nations”

“O.K. Lord, if that is what you want, that is what I will do.”

This wasn't the end of the story. The next day I began to try as hard as possible to say “No!” I didn't understand this call, and I didn't want it, but I had said “Yes.” ***Prophets receive their calling from God.*** We also need our recognition from the Church, but I will come back to that later. This call comes in many different ways. Here are some calls from the Bible:-

<b>The call of Isaiah</b>	<b>Isaiah 6</b>
<b>The call of Jeremiah</b>	<b>Jeremiah 1</b>
<b>The call of Amos</b>	<b>Amos 7:14-16</b>
<b>The call of Jonah</b>	<b>Jonah 1</b>
<b>The call of Peter</b>	<b>Luke 5:1-11</b>
<b>The call of Paul</b>	<b>Acts 9:1-19</b>

If God has called us to be prophets, we will have a testimony of that calling. It may not be spectacular, like Isaiah or Jonah. It may be quite simple and ordinary, but it is necessary to have some calling experience.

### **Biblical prophets show us that our callings have common features:-**

The Lord made the call, and those concerned knew that he was speaking to them. (Jeremiah)

They became aware of their humanity - their sinfulness, (Peter, Isaiah) their unsuitableness, (Jeremiah) their fear. (Jonah)

Their call had a powerful emotional impact on them. (Ezekiel)

The Lord made it clear what it was that he wanted from them, sometimes in words, but often in pictures. (Jeremiah, Amos)

For each, the way ahead was to prove very difficult. Amos came up against severe criticism, Paul didn't know what to do next, Isaiah received a tough commission, Jonah finished up in a fish, and Jeremiah passed through a series of very hard emotional experiences.

This last experience needs careful reflection by anyone called to prophecy. It reflects the deep inner turmoil and pain which this call places on the human spirit. Jeremiah experienced a great inner turmoil in his work. Fortunately he left these feelings clearly exposed for us to study. These passages, known as his "confessions" need careful study by any prophet. This will be our experience:

**11:18-23 "I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter"**

**12:1-6 "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?"**

**15:10-21 "Alas my mother, that you gave me birth."**

**17:14-18 "Where is the word of the Lord?"**

**18:18-23 "Let's make plans against Jeremiah."**

**20:7-13 "O Lord you deceived me.."**

**20:14-18 "Cursed be the day I was born."**

Our call exposes our weaknesses and inadequacies. This is necessary, because these things are part of prophetic daily experience. But the call is also the source of courage and strength. Again and again I have said to the Lord "I didn't ask for this call. Now you have a responsibility to help me in it." Without a call, when things get difficult, we cannot cry out to him in this way.

## **2. The heart of the Prophet**

When God called me to be a prophet, I thought the calling was all about the words I would speak. I was often saying to God:- "What happens if one day I don't have a word?" Then one day I had a very disturbing experience. While I was praying, the Lord said to me "Come up here and I will show you the things which are to come." I was very afraid, but said "O.K." Immediately I was in the heavenly places, and I looked around, expecting to see all sorts of powerful

earth-changing events. But all I saw was the Lord. While I was thinking about this, he showed me his broken heart. I was shocked. “Who has done this Lord?” I asked. He said to me “My creation has broken my heart again and again.” I didn’t know what to say. “What can I do Lord?” I asked. He replied “Stay and share it with me”

From that moment on, I came to realise that my calling is not about the words I speak, but about the relationship I have with him. Once that relationship is right, then all the words, prophecies and pictures can flow. I also realised that I would have to have the kind of heart which would be acceptable to him in this relationship. I would have to be changed. What kind of heart should a prophet have?

#### **a) The surrendered heart (Luke 18: 9-14)**

In this passage we meet two men with very different hearts. The one is so sure of himself:- “I thank you father that I am not like other men.” (v11) The sad thing is that he doesn’t see the true nature of his own heart. The other man is a very different story. He prays, “Lord have mercy on me a sinner.” (v13) He knows he has little to offer, but he surrenders what he has - he surrenders his heart to Jesus. ***Prophets must have hearts which are surrendered to Jesus*** – hearts which realise their own emptiness, their own worthlessness and their own inadequacy. Only then can Jesus fill that heart with his power. What does the surrendered heart look like?

#### **It is obedient (Acts 13:22)**

The surrendered heart puts God first: - “I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.”

#### **It endures (Habakkuk 3:18)**

The surrendered heart does not give up:-. “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.” From our point of view, there can only be one outcome of God’s will – it will be done.

#### **It doesn’t compromise (1 Kings 22:17)**

Once we have started on a course of caution, there is no turning back. Micaiah ben Imlah had an uncompromising heart. Instead of giving sweet words, which

would have made his life easy, he said: - "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'" I once made a decision, and someone said to a friend of mine "I am sure when we talk, prophet Jim will see the better path and be willing to change." Someone else replied "I don't think you understand the nature of a prophet's heart. Prophet Jim will never change his mind!"

### **It doesn't argue (Exodus 3 -4:17)**

Moses took a big chance by arguing with God. The man with the surrendered heart does not argue, but just does what God tells him to do. We have to be very clear here – we are not to be arrogant in our serving. I don't have all the answers, and I am glad of the advice of friends when I am thinking and planning for my work. God has made the Church my covering and my help. But fundamentally, ***I have surrendered my heart to Jesus, and I will do what he asks, when he asks, whatever he asks, and in the way he asks for it to be done.*** This is the basic heart of the prophet. It is our strength.

### **b) The Servant heart Mark 8:34**

So many leaders want position, power, respect, and honour. They go out of their way to be seen with powerful leaders, to take the seats of honour in the fellowship, and to be seen to be great in the eyes of God's people. This lack of the servant nature is destructive of themselves and the work they do. Prophets can suffer from this problem very acutely. Many want to be thought of as "great men of God." Many want to be looked up to for their ministries, and to be honoured for what they do. The true man or woman of God wants none of these things. He or she is seeking something far more precious – the heart which is in Jesus, which is the servant heart. Jesus said "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Any other desire will destroy the prophet. So what is the servant heart which we are seeking after?

### **It denies self (Mark 8:39)**

Victory over self was what Jesus gained in Gethsemane. It is the hardest battle to win. We are the centre of our own world. When we surrender to Jesus, he becomes the centre. We have to battle away to ensure that he stays there. Areas of conflict include:- Position: (Luke 18:9-14) Power: (Acts 8:9-25)

Sex: (Matthew 5:27-30) Control: (Mark 8:33) Money: (Acts 5:1-2) deceit: (2 Samuel 11:14-15)

### **It takes up the cross: (Mark 8:39)**

This is the way the servant walks:-The hard road: (Jeremiah 20:7) The lonely road: (Gethsemane. Mark 14:39) The suffering road: (Paul at Philippi. Acts 16:16-24) The servant road. (Jesus. John 13; Isa 53:1-3)

### **It follows (Mark 8:39)**

The servant follows obediently and willingly.

The servant heart is a commitment to a lifestyle of repentance and faith, obedience and sacrifice. It is a commitment to walking in the way of Jesus in full knowledge of what it might mean. Like Bartimaeus, (Mark 10:52) we follow him: like the man at Gate Beautiful, (Acts 3:8) we rejoice: like the woman bent double (Luke 13:13) we praise God.

### **c) The Pure heart which won't let sin cling on (Hebs 12:1)**

The writer to the Hebrews teaches: - "Let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles. (Hebrews 12:1) Sin clings to us, like chains, and if we do not get rid of these chains daily, we will trip up! The Bible tells us clearly that God forgives, (1 John 1:8-9) but prophets have to be very aware of what kind of sin clings, and how. Look at Matthew chapters 5 to 7 to help identify the areas of sin. This needs to be a regular personal study. Note in particular:-

**Anger.** (5:21-26). This must play no part in the life of the prophet, or it will dilute his word.

**Lust.** (5:27-30). The prophet is a powerful character, and can attract people of the opposite sex for the wrong reasons.

**Enemies.** (5:43-48) A prophet will make enemies. It's vital we know how to behave. Otherwise we will easily allow our attitude to affect our ministry.

**Giving.** (6:1-4) The temptation is to take. This can be overcome by having the opposite gift - the desire to give.

**Worry.** (6:25-34) There are so many pressures in this calling. We have to have a clear mind, not a worried one.

**Criticism.** (7: 1-5) We are daily being criticised. How we handle it is key to the growth of our ministry.

**d) The suffering heart.**

The prophet Hosea was called on to live out both the love and the suffering which he found in the heart of God. His message was simple - God loved his people, even though they kept prostituting themselves to other gods and other nations. No matter what, God could not give them up. To live out this message, Hosea had to marry a prostitute, and keep buying her back from her prostitution, to which she returned again and again. Even his precious children became symbols of despair and hope. (1:4, 1:6-7, 1:8)

It is not hard to imagine what this meant for him, as a father and a husband. He must have felt betrayed again and again – but he never gave up. He just suffered for the One who had called him into His service. His reward was to prophesy one of the most moving verses of scripture, giving us a precious glimpse into the loving heart of God: - “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over Israel?” (Hosea 11:8) We must be willing to suffer for our calling. We must share the sufferings of God, and the sufferings of his creation. We must be willing to suffer without complaint, without yielding to personal feelings or personal needs. It is really tough, but it is essential.

**e) The loving heart**

There is a real contradiction in the loving prophetic heart, and it is one which causes us much sorrow. On the one hand, we have to love God, and love his people. This is what all leaders are called on to do. But at the same time, we have to love deeply enough to be able to speak hard words, even judgmental words. Unlike other Faiths, our God judges out of love. He loves us so much, that he will not stop until he has made the relationship between us so strong that he can release the fullness of his love into us. So if we have strayed, and won't return, then he has to judge, in order to restore. He clearly expresses this in the days of Josiah. Despite all the religious reformation which that king carried through we read: “Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah...” (2 Kings 23:26) Jesus says much the same thing:-“Oh Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.” (Luke 14: 34) A prophet has to love enough to be able to move in this judgmental love.

He has to love enough not to speak in anger, and to continue to believe, as Jeremiah did, that judgment will lead to better things. This is a really tough love to experience, and requires a deep relationship with God to endure it.

### **3. The prophet's relationship with God**

Why must we struggle so much to get the right heart? It is because, standing in the presence of God, we have to be changed into His likeness, or we cannot do our work. We are called on to have a deep and powerful relationship with God, which is very intense. We are called on to share his heart. Here are some of the ways this works out:-

#### **Feeling his pain**

I learnt something about God's pain when I was travelling once by train. I was enjoying the view out of the window, and as we came to one village, an intense pain and sorrow came into my spirit. It stayed there until the train had pulled away from the village. "What was that?" I asked the Lord. "It was my pain and sorrow for that village," he replied. "But what can I do about it?" I asked. "Nothing," he said. "I just needed to share it with someone." I have had this experience many times since. ***It is part of a prophet's calling.***

#### **Knowing his love**

God just doesn't give up on his people. Hosea has already taught us: "How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over Israel?" (Hosea 11:8) God loves his people so much, and sometimes this love can hurt us, because we are not able to love with the intensity of His love.

#### **Sharing his frustration**

We get frustrated as prophets. We can't get the opportunity to share, we don't have enough resources, and nothing seems to be happening. I was so frustrated once, that I cried out to the Lord "Why don't you do something?" He didn't answer me, and then I began to realise that frustration is part of God's experience. He makes plans, and then his human agents don't listen, won't respond, or misunderstand. Sometimes I shout out "Make them do it. After all, you are God!" But I have had to learn that it doesn't work that way. When I am frustrated, sometimes I am feeling His frustration. It is hard to bear this feeling.

### **Entering his suffering**

I once went to God for a word. As I waited on him, I saw such pain and sorrow in his heart, that I was bowed down in agony. When I could hardly bear it anymore, he said “Tell them ‘will you crucify me again?’” To enter into this suffering of God is so costly for the prophet. But how else can we work? If we sit on the outside, then how can we deliver what we see and hear? Only by entering into the suffering, can we speak with authority about the sufferings of God. Young prophets do not want to read these things! They just want their “words.” It doesn’t work like that.

### **Sharing his ridicule and rejection**

I preached in a theatre, to an audience of Christians from a large Church. I spoke about the need for national repentance, so that God could bless the Nation. As I was preaching, I became aware that people did not like the message, and I wanted to stop. “Carry on” said the Lord. “But Lord,” I replied, “they are rejecting this message, and that doesn’t matter for me, but it does matter for you.” I felt the great sadness in his heart, but he said “Never mind. Carry on.” It was so hard for me, to feel this rejection of the One I love so much. But I had to do as I was told. In the end, they rejected me as well. They never invited me back to speak to them, although we had a relationship which went back for many years. They also got in touch with other churches which had supported me, telling them not to support me anymore. They even contacted some Churches in Africa, telling them to have no further involvement with me. I just had to take this rejection. It was hard for me, but so much harder for the Lord.

### **Sharing his grief over people.**

The prophet Samuel saw much good in King Saul, and he must have grieved Saul’s failure. But how much more must the Lord have grieved over it. (1 Samuel 13: 1-15. 1 Samuel 16:1) As prophets, we will see the grief of the Lord over people, as Churches and events fail, and sheep are lost. We have to learn not to react badly when we see these things, but be available to share the Lord’s sufferings.

These are just a few of the many experiences we will have to share, as we enter into a prophetic relationship with the Lord. There are many joys, and I

haven't written of those here. Joys are easy to bear! But for most of us, it is entering into the suffering and pain which is so hard and unexpected. Is it worth it? That is a question that each prophet has to answer for himself or herself. If we can bear this relationship, then we enter into a very special walk with the Lord, which enables us to know what he would say in any given circumstance. If we can't, then our experience will be much poorer. The choice is ours.

#### 4. The quality of his life

Once we know what kind of person we have to be on the inside, then the inside has to touch and change the outside. The two belong together, but many prophets seem to have overlooked this truth. ***The experience of the prophet is that his ministry is poured into his humanity.*** Hosea teaches us this to the utmost. So it is vital that inside and outside match up. So let's turn now to the outside. So what kind of qualities must we be asking God to develop in us? Take a look at these men and women of God:-

<b>Moses:</b>	<b>Humility. (Numbers 12:3)</b>
<b>Paul:</b>	<b>Toughness. (2 Cor 11: 16-33)</b>
<b>Joseph</b>	<b>Integrity. (Gen 41:37)</b>
<b>Micaiah</b>	<b>Uncompromising.(1 Kings 22:17)</b>
<b>Hannah</b>	<b>Prayerful (1 Samuel 1: 12-17)</b>
<b>Mary</b>	<b>Obedient (Luke 1:38)</b>

Where do we start? Rather than giving a long list of questions, there is just one that really matters: - ***Does my life reflect the quality of the life of Jesus?*** Then we can let the Holy Spirit lead us forward. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) is a very useful place in the Bible to give us guidance and help. Don't let's settle for the quality of life we have, but long to grow more pure and more Christ-like. If we approach our lives in this way, the Lord will raise the quality of who we are, to his glory. This will also allow him to release more power into us.

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