



**KING'S
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EDINBURGH

What does a prophet look like?

Isaiah 42

Perhaps the default image when asked to think of a prophet would be a wild-looking man shouting angrily in the wilderness. There's some justification for that (John the Baptist, for example) but like all God's people, prophets are various: the Bible tells us about men and women, rich and poor, deep thinkers and all-actions types, optimists and pessimists, who were given different messages to share which also affect them and how they communicated.

Christians are called to live a prophetic life: revealing God's will to the world. This impacts how they should be at work and at home and in this city, and what this church should be like. Isaiah 42:1-9 gives us a description of the ultimate prophet and shows us what is essential to living this way.

Characteristics of a prophet

Verse 2 tells us that this prophet is not rowdy or boastful, with their awareness of being called and loved by God (verse 1), they are peacefully humble. This is not some loud and proud superstar that you can't get anywhere near to – they're approachable and in fact seem to be seeking you out, responding to weaknesses with love (verse 3). They will bring light to darkness (6), sight to the blind (7) and freedom for captives (7). Their concern is not just individualistic but societal: three times we're told that God will use them to bring justice to the whole world (1, 3, 4). God cares passionately about injustice, he gave laws that were concerned with fairness for all and protection for the vulnerable: many Old Testament prophets focus on this theme.

The prophet's strength comes from God – He has put His Spirit on them (1) and they won't grow faint or be bruised (4) as the people they help are (3). A prophet brings real

hope for real change because they have the real power and love of God at work in them. You don't have to be a Christian to think that this sounds good: "Change we can believe in" – everyone loves that!

Message of a prophet

There is an exclusivism running throughout this passage: in God's choosing of this prophet (1) and in God's defining of Himself as YHWH, who made and sustains all things (5) and who will not share His glory with any other (8).

This sounds more like the shouting prophet of our imaginations, which confuses people. We're told so many times that nice people don't force their beliefs on others, and nasty people do but here we've got someone who is clearly wonderful and yet clearly uncompromising.

This is exactly what we see with Jesus in the gospels. His love and care are just like Isaiah 42 describes, and so are the shocking things that He says. He identifies Himself as a prophet, says He sent all the other prophets in the previous centuries, and teaches that they all pointed to Him, and He is the fulfilment of them! He doesn't just claim to speak the truth as other prophets did – He says is the truth. He doesn't just claim to represent God – He says that He is the only way to God because He is God.

Most people's assessment of Jesus, if they have one, chooses one or the other of these two things, because that's much easier: lovely guy, or crazy guy. Even the Bible acknowledges that He is the fullness of concepts that we usually separate, describing Him simultaneously as a lamb and a lion. They come together at the cross: where Jesus' love and care for us go to the ultimate extreme of suffering God's punishment for us, in the knowledge that He alone by the power of His divine life could achieve the rescue we needed from our sins.

What does a prophet look like? What do they say and do? They imitate Jesus, relying on the transforming power of His divine love to be radically loving, and radically truthful about what they believe. Most people find one or the other of these easier – which is it for you? Don't rely on your own efforts or preferences, ask the Holy Spirit of God to be upon you as He was upon Jesus.

Resources

- A Wind in the House of Islam, by David Garrison. He's also written an article summarising his findings for Premier Christianity (<http://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2016/June-2016/Muslims-turning-to-Christ-a-global-phenomenon>)
 - Article by The Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/05/european-churches-growing-flock-muslim-refugees-converting-christianity>) about Muslims becoming Christians in Europe
 - 30 Days of Prayer (<http://pray30days.org/>) for Muslims during Ramadan
 - Sharing the gospel with Muslims using the Friendship First (<http://friendshipfirst.org/>) course
 - Open Doors (<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/>) is a charity working with persecuted Christians
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Questions

What comes to your mind when you imagine what a prophet looks like and does?

How does this shape what being prophetic looks like on a daily basis?

A prophetic people are radically loving, and radically truthful about what they believe – which of these two aspects of prophetic living do you find most challenging?

How does the gospel help us to be both loving and truthful?

What have you thought and said to others about the murders in Orlando?

What did you find most encouraging about the stories Luke shared of Jesus saving Muslims?



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