

Do you remember when you were a kid ... going to the grocery store with your mom ... and she would let you pick out your own breakfast cereal? Do you remember *how* you picked out your cereal? Exactly. The best cereal had the best prize in it. *The* difference between Lucky Charms and Capt'n Crunch was the prize. For a ten-year old, nutrition, price and cavities are not the issue. It's the prize in the box that matters.

Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. The field itself may not be worth a whole lot but when a man finds out there's treasure hidden in it, that changes everything. He will go out and sell everything to buy that field.

And that ... is sort of like what prophecy is. Prophecy is like the treasure in the field ... like finding something you didn't realize was there. Prophets have a way of explaining reality so that it changes the way we see things. They show us truths about God and about ourselves that we may not have seen on our own. So prophecy is not just about seeing into the future. It is any word that reveals God.

Isaiah is considered the greatest prophet in the Old Testament. And in chapter 53, Isaiah shows us the prize in the box ... the treasure in the field. He tells us the Messiah will be one of us ... someone who understands. He saw a complete picture of the One who would justify us ... who would bear our sins and shame and mistakes. Isaiah said (Isaiah 53:11) – *By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities.* So the greatest Old Testament prophet revealed the coming of the greatest prophet of all.

What is a prophet, exactly? A prophet is:

- a mouthpiece for God

- points to God (his nature, plan, commands)
- points to where God is at work so we can join him
- encourages people in obedience
- tells believers what they need to know to meet specific situations
- reveals where God is working to reconcile the world to himself

All of these things are like treasures in a field. Like the prize in the cereal box. A prophet is someone who finds these treasures ... who sees where God is at work and where God is headed. And they point us toward that treasure. (Slide: **Was Jesus a prophet?**) We don't often think of Jesus as a prophet, but in the best sense of that term, he was. Probably a half-dozen other verses in the New Testament call him a prophet. Luke 24:19 says, "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people."

(SLIDE: **What does it matter to me?**) So what does this matter to us? Well, the prophetic words of Jesus are there to encourage us and strengthen us in faith. They help us to see where God is at work so we can join him. That's what Jesus was all about. Jesus points us to God. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. Jesus was the very image of God. He says (John 14:6-10a) – *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father.' Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"*

Jesus is what God looks like in a person so if you want to know God, look at Jesus. Michael Spencer says it is sort of like saying, "If you read chapter 6, you will know all the answers for

the exam.” Chapter six may be about the solar system and there may be a whole lot more to the solar system than they put in one chapter, but everything you need to know to pass the exam is given to you in chapter six. In the same way, Spencer says, “God has revealed all we can understand and all we need to understand about himself as our Father in and through Jesus.” Jesus is the very picture of God. He points us to God.

Carl Medearis is a follower of Jesus who is considered an expert in the field of Arab-American and Muslim-Christian relations. He lived as a missionary in Lebanon for twelve years. In his book, *Muslims, Christians and Jesus*, Medearis talks about going to a meeting of some top-level Lebanese political leaders. He says he was there “to discuss how these men could work with us in bridging the Arab East with the American West.” At that gathering, he met a man named Mohsen ... Sunni Muslim parliament member. In the course of conversation Mohsen asked Medearis what he did for a living. Now, Medearis is something like a missionary to the Muslim world, but he’s pretty careful about saying it that way. So when this guy asked him who he was, Medearis said he’d never used this term before or since, but in that moment he was inspired to call himself a “hope broker.” Mohsen asked what a hope broker was, and Medearis said, “Well ... I deal hope.” Mohsen had just been talking about how desperate the situation in Lebanon was at the time, so he was really interested in this hope broker. He asked Medearis, “Where do you get it? The hope. Where do you get your hope?”

Medearis said, “Well, it is so simple its almost silly. Here’s the idea ... we gather a few people together about once a week. We do a few basic things. First, we try to pray for the country. We are a mix of Muslims, Christians and Druze (Druze are a sect of Islam). We all say we believe in a God who can save people, so we thought we’d start where we agree ... with prayer. But lately, we’ve realized we need more than prayer. We need something to bind us together.

Something to focus on. To study. So we decided to study the life of a great person who we could all agree on.”

Medearis asked if Mohsen could think of someone they could study that they could all agree on and Mohsen mentioned a few names like Gandhi and Mother Teresa. Then, suddenly he pounded his fist on the table (Medearis said it scared him to death) and he said, “I’ve got it! Its Jesus! Muslims like Jesus. Druze like Jesus. Even Christians like Jesus!” That’s exactly the way he said it. “Even Christians ...” Then Mohsen asked Medearis if he would start a group with members of the Lebanese parliament and so they did. They started a study in the Lebanese parliament ... and they studied through the gospel of Luke. And that little group of Lebanese leaders studying Jesus together ... that hasn’t changed the world ... at least not yet. But do you see how it is planting a treasure in their field? Pointing people to God?

Because, see ... The Muslim world worships a god with no image of Jesus imbedded in it. And without Jesus, there is no hope. Remember? By *His* wounds, we are healed. So if those Muslims are studying the life of Jesus, maybe they will begin to see the heart of the Father. Because Jesus points us to God. He is the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through him. So do you see? As they study, Jesus the prophet may well point them to Jesus the Messiah.

And that matters to us because it is the same principle at work, no matter what religion you call yourself. If the God that’s in your head ... the one you follow and worship ... doesn’t look like Jesus, then you’re following the wrong god. Here’s an exercise you might try one day this week. On one side of a sheet of paper, write down some phrases that describe your impression of God ... things you always heard about him or thought about him. On the other side, write

down what you know about Jesus. Then look to see if the two sides line up. Does the God you always believed in look like Jesus? And does the way you practice faith in God make your life look like the life of Jesus? If not, maybe you're really missing out.

The prophet Jesus also shows us where God is at work. I want to ask you to find a place on your insert where you can make a list. I'm going to read from Matthew, chapter 25 and as I read, I want you to write down everything you hear Jesus say about where God works. Jesus is talking here about the end of time (which is a very prophetic kind of thing) ... but really ... he's steering his followers into the current of God's will. So listen to this passage and jot down everything you hear him say about where God is at work in the world.

Matthew 25:31-40 says - *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"*

So what do you hear in this passage about where God is at work? Just call it out.

First, he's at work watching how those who claim faith in him live. I also hear in this passage that God cares about hungry people, and poor people, and sick people, and people who feel rejected and oppressed. This is where God is at work. So if Jesus the prophet is about moving people into the current of God's will, where do you think he is leading them?

I have to tell you ... this is something I have to come back to over and over again in my own life ... that I don't get to decide what it means to be a follower. Jesus has already cast that vision. And ... to the extent that we relinquish our rights to Self and our comfort zones, we will find ourselves more and more in the company of the broken-hearted, the blind, the poor, the prisoners, the ones who never knew they had the favor of God. This is what it means to follow Jesus. This is where God is at work. Is your life in line with these values?

You've got a couple of other points there in your outline that you can dig into at home. I want to skip to that last point, where Jesus as prophet shows us God's plan for the world. Here's what Jesus told his followers when they were on their way to Jerusalem for what would be the last time. On this trip, Jesus would finally be arrested and convicted for revealing the will of God on earth. He told his followers (Matthew 20:17-19) – *“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day, he will be raised to life!”*

Why did any of that have to happen? Well, this takes us right back to Isaiah 53:11. *By his knowledge, he will justify many and he will bear their iniquities.* Jesus is the bridge that spans

that gap between our fallenness ... our woundedness ... our imperfection ... and the holiness of God.

The whole thing boils down to that gap. That gap is what separates us from all the joy and freedom and hope that comes with real life. Maybe part of that gap is created by how we misunderstand who God is. Maybe part of it is created by the ways we run from him.

We stand on one side of that gap. And God stands on the other. God stands in a perfect place, and we stand in a very imperfect place. And that gap separates us from the perfect life. The sinless life. And not even your best attempts will get you to the other side ... because we can not get there on our own strength. We all want to become everything we know we were intended to be, but we can't get there on our own. So ... what's the answer? Well, we need something or someone that can span that gap for us ... someone who will stand on our behalf and advocate for us. Or someone who can stand in the gap between God and the world. And it would have to be someone who is perfect, who has overcome every obstacle, including death ... who is able to on his own to reach from death back to God.

History tells us there is only one person who has done that. Jesus says he is that guy. Remember? He said, *"They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day, he will be raised to life!"* And just like he said it would happen ... that's how it happened. Jesus beat death. So ... Jesus is the original hope broker. He deals hope into a hopeless situation. Jesus crawls onto a cross and says, "Look, guys! I see a way over! I'll lay down, and you guys can cross by way of me. If you try to jump, thinking somehow I'm not strong enough to bear you over, you won't make it. But if you'll let me take you from where you are to where God is ... if you will let me take you from

death to life ... then you can have life forever ... real life ... and have it in full. Paul said it like this. He said (2 Corinthians 5:21), “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Here’s the thing: We need the message of Jesus, but even more we need his life. Because his life breeds life. It points us to God. It shows us where God is at work. And it reveals God’s plan for the world. We need his life. And if you haven’t received it yet, then today is a good day to do that ... to trust Jesus with your life. Will you stand? If this is your day to make that commitment ... to trust Jesus with your whole life and to make your idea of God line up with who Jesus is ... then I want to invite you to agree with me in this prayer. And if you’d like to make a physical sign of that commitment, then as we pray you can lift a hand:

God, I get it, that you are holy and I am not. You are perfect and I am not. I’ve misunderstood who you are, and I’ve run from you. And that’s created a gap between us ... a gap that separates me from all the joy and freedom and hope that you offer. So I’m asking you, God, to let me cross over to you through Jesus. I am sorry for trying to do this on my own, and I ask you to forgive me and justify my existence because of Christ. And from today forward help me to shape my life around the things that matter to you. Help me to make my life look more and more like Jesus. It’s his name that I want to serve, honor and follow ... the name of Jesus.
Amen.

I want to close today by giving you a chance to meet Jesus at the table. Communion is the whole story in the form of food. The whole story is right here on this table. Promise, sacrifice, forgiveness, victory, life ... its all here. You’re invited to come to the table this morning and meet Jesus.