THE PROPHETS

Would that all God's children were prophets.
Numbers 11: 29

"This is indeed a consummation devoutly to be wished." Indeed every true child of God is in some measure a prophet. But it is of the great prophets of the Old Testament that we are thinking this morning. Let me say at once that this sermon is by way of introduction. For the coming weeks, I want us to seek to meet anew some of the great prophets of the Old Testament. Naturally such a study may seem to some rather dry, rather dull and dusty. It may seem like turning aside from the vigorous life about us to look at a few fossils. It may seem at best to some a ramble among ancient tombs.

Of course, such is not in reality the case. The prophets were and are still a dynamic group of men. They lived in days of national and international upheaval, such as our own. They heard the clash of great despotisms battling for power. They also heard the crash of these despotisms as they fell into ruins. They stood face to face then with the fact that righteousness exalts a nation while sin bends the neck of any people. The messages that they gave to the world were timely. They spoke to the needs of their day. Being in the truest sense timely, these messages are also timeless. These prophets, therefore, have a gripping word for your day and mine.

I

What kind of men were these prophets? They were quite varied. No two of them were alike. Each honored his own individuality. Some of them were men of genius while others were not so gifted. Some were backwoodsmen
while others were men of the city. Some spoke in rugged and blunt prose, while others used the language of poetry. Each saw the truth with his own eyes and spoke as he saw. But while they differed, they also had much in common.

1. They were all human. That sounds trite, I know, but it needs to be said for a variety of reasons. This is the case, in the first place, because they are men of the Bible. Many have a strange way of thinking of Bible characters as museum specimens rather than living personalities. Not only were they men of the Bible but they were men of high character. They were saintly men. That makes them seem to some less human. In addition, they were preachers. There are those still, who divide humanity into three groups: men, women and preachers. But in spite of this fact so long as we think of these prophets as other than human they will have no power to help us. Whenever any man becomes more prophet than man he loses his usefulness.

As we study these men, therefore, we will find them in spite of their greatness to be possessed of many of our human frailties. Some of them were distressingly lacking in a sense of humor. That is always crippling. Some of them, I can well imagine, were a bit hard to live with. One of them, at least, was an old bachelor. That types him at once. All old bachelors are inclined to be cranky. Some of them are lovely cranks, but they are cranks none-the-less. Some of them uttered their words of burning rebuke as if they took a kind of harsh joy in them. These preachers were all human.

2. They were all men of insight. They were possessed of the seeing eye. Naturally some saw more clearly than others, but this gift of vision characterized them all. It is significant that one of the first names given to the prophet was - the seer. It is this power to see that has characterized the true prophets.
through all the centuries. It is an essential part of the prophetic gift.

When Jesus was talking to the woman at the well, after He had awakened her interest in the living water, He said "Go call your husband and come here". The woman answered - "I have no husband". Jesus replied, "Thou hast well said 'I have no husband' for thou hast had five husbands and he whom thou now hast is not your husband". Then it is that the woman looks at the Master with new and keener interest. "Sir", she said, "I perceive thou art a prophet." Why so? Because He had looked into her very heart. He had been able to see her for what she was. He was a man of insight. This, I repeat, is a gift that is characteristic of all the prophets. They saw more clearly than their fellows. They read, as others could not, the inner facts about the lives of individuals and of their own nations and of the nations of the world.

Because of this insight, these men often foretold the future. They did this with such veracity that the power to foretell came by some to be considered an essential characteristic of the prophets. But this power to foretell was, generally speaking, incidental rather than essential. The prophet could foretell the future because he understood the present. The physician who recognizes incipient cancer can tell with considerable accuracy the future of the one suffering from that disease. Even so these men, seeing the diseases from which the individuals and nations of their day were suffering, were able to foretell some of the tragedies that were ahead. These men were all men of insight.

3. The prophets were, generally speaking, lonely men. This loneliness did not grow out of the fact that they held aloof from their fellows. They were not men of the cloister. They were not men who lived their lives drawn from others.
They were in a peculiar sense men among men. They lived where crossed the crowded ways of life. They knew their way about the busy streets of the city. They were men often acquainted with the multitudes. What, then, was the reason for their loneliness? It was born, in part, of their insight. It was because they saw what others did not see. Seeing more clearly than others, they shared neither the faith nor the fear of the men about them.

That fact put them in a class to themselves. Isaiah pictures God as telling him plainly not to fear what others feared nor to call out danger when they called out danger. For instance, in Jeremiah's day, the people were afraid not to rebel against Babylon. Jeremiah urged submission to Babylon. He saw the futility of rebellion. This caused the great prophet to be regarded as a Quisling and a traitor. It put him in a class almost to himself.

Then these prophets could not trust in the confidences in which their fellows trusted. Many of their fellows looked to the future unafraid because they believed themselves the favorites of heaven. But the prophets knew that God was able of the very stones to raise up children for Abraham. They saw that the fact that God had greatly blessed them, increased their obligation and made more sure their judgment if they failed to discharge their obligation.

Their leaders were constantly turning from one pagan nation to another in search of an alliance that would make them secure. They were constantly leaving God out of their plans. It was the work of the prophets to remind them that God had a plan and that there was no salvation apart from Him. Because the prophets did not fear the fears of the people, because they did not trust in the confidences of the people, they were very lonely.
4. These prophets were men of fiery earnestness. Out of their glowing souls they uttered thoughts that breathe and words that burn. They were sure of the truth of the message they had to deliver. They had a firm conviction of its importance. They were certain that what they had to say was a matter of life and death. Because they believed, therefore, they spoke and spoke with power. No man is worth hearing who has ceased to believe in the importance of his own message.

So earnest were these men that they were bent on getting their message across at whatever cost. Sometime ago a certain minister preached a sermon full of verbal meteors that were bright and barren. A friend was brave enough to say to him: "Why do you not use simple language that the people can understand?" But this apostle of display answered, almost indignantly: "I am not going to descend to their level, they must climb to mine". He was out to save his literary style rather than to save the people. The tragic result was that he lost both. There is a power in simple earnest effort that the man of display cannot know.

These men were so bent on getting a hearing that they sometimes resorted to means that were shocking. Take Isaiah for instance, he named one son a name that signified "speed to the prey - hasten to the spoil;" another son he named - "a remnant shall be left." His very sons were as signs to the people. Then this man who was an aristocrat, a man that was at home in kings' palaces, this man who was perhaps the best intellect of his time went about the streets of Jerusalem three years barefooted and half dressed. When men asked him why he dared to appear on the streets dressed, or undressed, in that shocking fashion he would reply: "This is the way you are going to look as you are lead into exile unless you repent of your sins."
They were men who believed their beliefs. They were men who were desperately bent on being heard. A fiery and dynamic group they were. We feel the glow of their hot hearts across the wide space of the years.

5. Finally these men had vivid religious experiences. They were all men who had met God. They were men who knew how to pray. They prayed in the finest sense, not simply by asking God for something but also by listening to God. They were men to whom God could make known His will. They lived constantly in His fellowship. They were men who were girded and made strong by a compelling sense of mission. They were men sent of God.

II

What was their mission?

They were God's spokesmen. A prophet is one who speaks for another. When Moses was being sent on his mission, he complained that he could not speak. Then God promised that Aaron should be the prophet of his stammering brother. That is Moses was to tell Aaron what to say. In somewhat the same fashion, God spoke his message to the prophets. Thus they were able to begin their sermons by saying -- "Thus saith the Lord". Ezekiel put it in these words: "Thou shalt hear the words at my mouth and warn men from me".

This does not mean, of course, that God dictated to the prophets as one would dictate to a stenographer. God's message is both human and divine. We speak of a bee gathering honey, but in so speaking we are not true to the facts. All the flowers in all the world haven't a single drop of honey. These flowers have a kind of nectar that the bees gather. Having gathered it, they put some part of themselves into it and lo, the miracle of honey. The prophet listened to God, but having listened he put some of himself into what he heard and we have the miracle of his message.
It was then the work of this man of insight to interpret the mind of God to the men of his day. He held the plumb line of the divine will and righteousness against the doings of men and nations. Naturally, he found both the deeds and their doers crooked - out of plumb. For this reason, because he saw somewhat as God saw, he became, generally speaking, the most caustic critic of his day. As we study these prophets, we shall see the sins against which they flamed and at which they hurled their thunderbolts. Seeing as God saw, they rebuked men for their drunkenness and their inhumanity to each other. He rebuked the rich for grinding the face of the poor.

Not only was he the caustic critic, but he promised judgment. He told his own nation that it was headed toward disaster. This was the case not because God in his anger had declared that they should not live, but it was true because by virtue of their sin they had ceased to be fit to live. He told great nations that were proudly dominating the world that their doom was sealed. Long since these nations to which he spoke have passed into the night as if God had said "Depart from me ye cursed."

Not only was the prophet the sharpest critic of his day, but he was also the one man offered a sure hope. He saw with a clear eye the black clouds that lay along the horizon of the future, but he also saw a glint of blue sky behind the clouds. He was sure of the dawn of a better day. He was sure of this for the individual - that though his sins were as scarlet, they should be white as snow. He was sure of it for the nation, if they would only take God into their plans. Thus he warned the men of his day against impending disaster and comforted them in the hours of
humiliation and overthrow. He was God's spokesman to his day and because he spoke to his own day, he speaks to every day.

III

How was this spokesman for God received? One would naturally think that any man who could interpret the mind of God to his generation would be the most welcome and the best loved man of his day. One would think that our bewildered and befuddled humanity would wait for such a man as watchers wait for the dawn. But such was not the case in that far off day. It will not become completely the case until the Glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Instead of being popular, these men, generally speaking, were the best hated men of their time. They had few friends and many bitter enemies. The New Testament gives emphasis to this fact: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Again Jesus sobs: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that stonest the prophets and killest them that sent unto thee." Also Stephen asks, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" Then as if to show they were the children of their fathers they dragged the prophet Stephen outside the city gates and stoned him to death.

As a path to popularity, no man could recommend the life of a prophet. But the fact that he failed to save the men of his day, does not mean that his ministry was a failure. The men that pushed him aside couldn't finally push aside his message. Therefore, these men long dead, still speak. They had that to say that, across the centuries, has supremely mattered. Today they are about the most up-to-date groups in all the world. Living their
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lives in times of crises they are especially fitted for us who are part of a world that has been turned upside down. They call aloud for that in our personal, national and international relationships, without which there is no hope. They call for realities of eternal hope with God.

Last week I read that the merchants on Broadway are preparing to wall up their plate glass windows in preparation of the celebration of our coming victory. Recently I heard a gentleman say that every reservation had been taken in every hotel and in every night spot in one of our leading southern cities to celebrate the coming of victory. How are they preparing for our coming victory?

We are facing a generation by getting drunk. Millions seem to have no better way of paying tribute to those who have died and to those whose tomorrows will be a daily dying, that by story of debauchery. It is, therefore, vastly important that we turn aside from these distorting voices to listen to men who have a sure word from God. This is the case because He is the one hope of the day and the one hope of tomorrow.

* * * * *
THE PROPHET

Yea, that all God's children were prophets.

James 11:28

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Of course, much is not in reality the case. The prophets were, and are still, a dynamic group of men. They lived in days of national and international upheaval such as our own. They heard the clash of great despots, sages, battling for power. They also heard the crash of these despots as they fell into ruin. They stood face to face with the facts that righteousness makes manifest, a nation while it bends the neck of one people. The message that they gave is the word was timely. They spoke to the needs of their day. Being in the breast, sense, time, these messages are also timeless. The prophets therefore have a gripping word for your day and mine.

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1. They were all human. That sounds trite, I know, but it needs to be said for a variety of reasons. This is the case, in the first place, because they are men of the Bible. Many have a strange way of thinking of Bible characters as museum specimens rather than living personalities. Not only were they men of the Bible but they were men of high character. They were saintly men. That makes them seem to some less human. In addition, they were preachers. There are those still who divide humanity into three groups: men, women, and preachers. But, in spite of this fact, so long as we think of these prophets as other than human, they will have no power to help us. Whenever any man becomes more prophet than man he loses his usefulness.

As we study these men, therefore, we will find them, in spite of their greatness, to be possessed of many of our human frailties. Some of them were distressingly lacking in a sense of humor. That is always crippling. Some of them, I can well imagine, were a bit hard to live with. One of them, at least, was an old bachelor. That types him at once. All old bachelors are inclined to be cranky. Some of them are lovely cranks, but they are cranks none-the-less. Some of them uttered their words of burning rebuke as if they took a kind of harah joy in them. These preachers were all human.

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Then these prophets could not trust in the confidences in which their fellows trusted. Many of their fellows looked to the future unafraid because they believed themselves the favorites of heaven. But the prophets knew that God was able, of the very stones, to raise up children to Abraham. They saw that the fact that God had greatly blessed them increased their obligation and made more sure their judgment if they failed to discharge that obligation. But the leaders of the people persistently turned from one pagan nation to another, in search of an alliance that would make them secure. They were constantly leaving God out of their plans. It was the work of the prophets to remind both the leaders and those whom they were leading or misleading, that God had a plan and that there was no salvation apart from Him. Because the prophets did not fear the fears of the people, because they did not trust in the confidences of the people, they were very lonely.

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5. The prophets were not popular. They were generally heartily hated. It is not difficult to see why this was the case. They were too far ahead of their fellows. They were also men who dared rebuke the popular sins of their day whether those sins were practiced by prince or pauper. Being hated, they were persecuted. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" questioned Stephen. And Jesus said "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you----- Rejoice and be exceeding glad----- for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you". The prophets won a place of high honor among their people, but only after they were dead, while they lived they were hated and persecuted.

6. Finally, these men had vivid religious experiences. They were all men who had met God. They were men who knew how to pray. They prayed in

the finest sense, not simply by asking God for something, but also by listening to God. They were men to whom God could make known His will. They lived constantly in His fellowship. They were men who were girded and made strong by a compelling sense of mission. They were men sent of God.

II

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One would naturally think that any man who could interpret the mind of God to his generation would be the most welcome and the best loved man of his day. One would think that our bewildered and befuddled humanity would wait for such a man, as watchers wait for the dawn. But such was not the case in that far off day. It will not become completely the case until the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

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As a path of popularity, no man could recommend the life of a prophet. But the fact that he was often hated, the fact that he generally failed to save the men of his own day, does not mean that his ministry was a failure. Though his contemporaries often pushed him aside, they could not finally push aside his message. Therefore these prophets, though long dead, still speak. This is the case, because they had that to say, which both in their own day and across the centuries supremely mattered. Today they are about the most up-to-date group in all the world. Living their lives in times of crisis, they are especially fitted to speak to us, who are part of a world that has been turned upside down. They call aloud for that in our personal, national, and international relationships, without which there is no hope. They call for, realization of, and, rightness with, God.
When Ephraim wanted a blessing from
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and ignored. Tradition tells us that in
the last paid for his loyalty, as God's
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these years in hiding. In spite of the
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THE PROPHETS

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Numbers 11:29

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while others used the language of poetry. Each saw the truth with his own eyes and spoke as he saw. But while they differed, they also had much in common.

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As we study these men, therefore, we will find them in spite of their greatness to be possessed of many of our human frailties. Some of them were disgustingly lacking in a sense of humor. That is always crippling. Some of them, I can well imagine, would have been a bit hard to live with. One of them, at least, was an old bachelor. That types him at once. All old bachelors are inclined to be cranky. Some of them are lovely cranks, but they are cranks none-the-less. Some of them uttered their words of burning rebuke as if they took a kind of harsh joy in them. These preachers were all human.

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When Jesus was talking to the woman at the well, after He had awakened her interest in the living water, He said - Go call your husband and come here. The woman answered - I have no husband. Jesus replied "Thou hast well said 'I have no husband' for thou hast had five husbands and he whom thou now hast is not your husband". Then it is that the woman looks at the Master with steeled, keen interest. "Sir", she said, "I perceive thou art a prophet". Why so? Because He had looked into her very heart. He had been able to see her for what she was. He was a man of insight. This, I repeat, was a gift that was characteristic of all the prophets. They saw more clearly than their fellows. They read the inner facts about the lives of individuals and of their nations and of the nations of the world.

Because of this insight, these men often foretold the future. They did this with such veracity that the power to foretell came by some to be considered an essential characteristic of the prophets but this power to foretell was, generally speaking, incidental rather than essential. The prophet could foretell the future because he understood the present. The physician who recognizes incipient cancer can tell with considerable accuracy the future of the one suffering from that disease. Even so when these men saw the incipient diseases of individuals and nations of their day were suffering, they were able to foretell some of the tragedies of tomorrow. These men were all men of insight.

3. The prophets were, generally speaking, lonely men. This loneliness did not grow out of the fact that they held aloof from their fellows. They were not men of the cloister. They were not men who live life with drun...
They were in a peculiar sense men among men. They lived where crossed
the crowded ways of life. They knew their way about the crowded streets
of the city. They were men often acquainted with the multitudes. What,
then, was the reason for their loneliness? It was born, in part, by their
insight. It was because they saw what others did not see. Seeing more
clearly than others, they shared neither the faith nor the fear of the
men about them. That fact put them in a class to themselves.

Isaiah pictures God as telling him plainly not to fear what others
feared nor to call out danger when they called out danger. For instance,
in Jeremiah's day, the people were afraid not to rebel against Babylon.
Jeremiah held to the hope of Babylon. He saw the futility of rebellion.
This caused the great prophet to be regarded as a quisling and a traitor.
It put him in a class almost to himself.

Then these prophets could not trust in the confidences in which
their fellows trusted. Many of them looked to the future unafraid because
they believed themselves the favorite of heaven. But the prophets knew
that God was able of the very stones to raise up children for Abraham.
They saw that the fact that God had greatly placed them increased their
obligation and made more sure their judging it if they failed to discharge
their obligation. Their leaders were constantly turning from one pagan
nation to another in search of relief that would make them secure. They
were constantly leaving God out of their plans. It was the work of the
prophets to remind them that God had a plan and that there was no salvation
apart from him. Because the prophets did not fear the fears of the people,
because they did not trust in the confidences of the people, they were very
lonely.
4. These prophets were men of fiery earnestness. Out of their glowing souls they uttered thoughts that lived and words that burned. They were sure of the truth of their message they had to deliver. They had a firm conviction of its importance. They were certain that what they had to say was a matter of life and death. Because they believed, therefore, they spoke and spoke with power. No man is worth hearing who has ceased to believe in the importance of his own message.

So earnest were these men that they were bent on getting their message across at whatever cost. Sometime ago a certain minister had preached a sermon full of verbal meteors that were bright and bearing. A friend was brave enough to say to him: "Why do you not use simple language that the people can understand?" After a positive display, he answered, almost indignantly: "I am not going to descend to their level, they must climb to mine. He was out to save the literary side rather than to save the people. The tragic result was that he lost both. There is a power in simple earnest effort that the man of display simply cannot know.

These desperate men resorted to means that were shocking, they were so terribly in earnest. Take Isaiah for instance, he named one son the name that signified speed to the prey - hasten to the spoil; another son he named - a remnant shall be left. His very sons were as assigned to the people. Then this man who was an aristocrat, a man that was at home in kings' palaces, this man who was perhaps the best intellect of his time went about the streets of Jerusalem three years barefooted and half dressed. When men asked him why he would appear on the streets dressed, or undressed, in that shocking fashion he would reply: this
is the way you are going to look as you are lead into exile unless you repent of your sins. They were men who believed their beliefs. They were men who were desperately bent on being heard. A fiery and dynamic group they were. The glow of their hot hearts brings you warmth across the wide space of the years.

5. Finally these men had vivid experiences. They were all men who had met God. They were men who knew how to pray. They prayed in the finest sense, not simply asking God for something but also listening to God. They were men to whom God could make known His will. They lived constantly in His fellowship. They were men who were girded and made strong the compelling sense of mission. They were men sent of God.

II

What was their mission?

They were God’s spokesmen. A prophet is one who speaks for another. When Moses was being sent on his mission, he complained that he could not speak. Then God promised that Aaron should be the prophet of his stammering brother. That is that Moses was to tell Aaron what to say. In the same fashion, God spoke to these prophets his message. Thus they were able to begin their sermons by saying - Thus saith the Lord. Ezekiel put it in these words: "Thou shalt hear the words of my mouth in warning men from me".

This does not mean, of course, that God dictated to the prophets as one would dictate to a stenographer. God’s message is both human and divine. We speak of a bee gathering honey, but in so speaking we are not true to the facts. All the flowers in all the world haven’t a single drop of honey. These flowers have a bit of nectar that the bees gather
having gathered it, they put some part of themselves into it and lo, the
miracle of honey. This message of the prophet came from God but he put
some of himself into it and we have the miracle of His message.

It was then the duty of this man of insight to interpret the mind
of God to the men of his day. He held the plumb line of divine righteousness
against the doings of many nations. Naturally, he found these deeds and
their doers crooked - out of plumb. For this reason, because he saw some-
what as God saw he became, generally speaking, the most caustic critic of
his day. As we study these prophets, we shall see the sins against which
they flamed and at which they hurled their thunderbolts. Seeing as God
saw, they rebuked men for their drunkenness and their inhumanity to each
other. He rebuked the rich for grinding the face of the poor. Not only
was he the caustic critic but it was his duty to promise judgment. He told
his own nation that it was headed toward disaster. This was the case not
that they should not live, because God's anger had declared but it was true because by virtue of
their sin they had ceased to be fit to live. He told great nations who
were proudly conquering the worlds that their doom was sealed, and the nations
to which he spoke has long since passed into the night as if God had said,
"Depart from me ye cursed". 

Not only was the prophet the sharpest critic of his day but he was the
one man that offered a sure hope. He saw the black cloud along the horizon
of the future with a clear eye, but he could always point out a glint of
blue sky behind the cloud. He was sure of the dawn of a better day. He
was sure of this for the individual - that though his sins be as scarlet,
they should be white as snow. He was sure of it for the nations, if they
would only take God into their plans. Thus he warned the men of his day
against impending disaster and comfort them in the horrors of humility and
overthrow. He was God's spokesman to his day and because he spoke to
his own day, he speaks to every day.

III

How was this spokesman for God received? One would naturally think that any man who could interpret the mind of God to his generation would be most welcome and the best loved man of his day. One would think this bewildered and befuddled humanity would wait for such a man as watches wait for the dawn. But such was not the case in that far off day. It will not become completely the case until the Glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Instead of being popular, these men, generally speaking, were the best hated men of their time. They had few friends and many bitter enemies. The New Testament gives emphasis to this fact: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you". Again Jesus says: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that stonest the prophets and killest them that is sent into thee", and Stephen asks, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted!", then as if to show they were the children of their fathers they tracked the prophet Stephen outside the city gates and stoned him to death. As a path to popularity, no man could recommend the life of a prophet. But the fact that he failed to save the men of his day does not mean that his ministry was a failure. The men that pushed him aside couldn't finally push aside his message. Therefore, these men long dead still speak. They had that to say across the centuries that has supremely mattered. Today they face the most up-to-date groups in all the world. Living their lives in times of crises they are especially fitted for us who are part of the world that has been
turned upside down. They call aloud for that in our personal, national and international relationships, without which there is no hope.

Last week I read that the merchants on Broadway are preparing to wall up their plate glass windows in preparation of the celebration of our coming victory. I heard a gentleman say that every reservation had been taken in every hotel and in every night spot in one of our leading southern cities to celebrate the coming of victory. How?? Generally by getting drunk. Millions seem to have no better way of paying tribute to those who have died and to those whose tomorrows will be daily dying than by orgies of debauchery. It is, therefore, vastly important that we turn aside from these distracting voices to listen to men who have a sure word from God. This is the case because He is the one hope of the day and the one hope of tomorrow.