

Identifying the True Prophet - Part 2

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of coming before God without conditions, separating from human expectation, and waiting for God's timing in order to truly hear from Him and receive the word of God.

Duration: 39:00

Scripture: Proverbs 4:20-22, Matthew 4:4, Romans 10:17, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, James 1:22

Topics: "Prophet"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of applying machine-age methods to our relationship with God. He highlights the negative consequences of this approach, such as shallow lives, hollow religious philosophies, and the glorification of men. The speaker emphasizes the importance of embracing reality, even when it is painful, as it is the foundation of everything and allows us to stay connected with God. He also encourages a deep respect for the word of God and preaching as a sacred phenomenon that brings about change in our lives.

Transcript

Can we consider a little bit about the proximity of the Prophet to God? How does he know what God's thought is? Where does he receive the word that is communicating as being very God's? What gives him access that is not available to us? What can we assume about the proximity of the man to the heart of God? How is that obtained? How is that maintained? Is that an easy thing? What about distracting voices? What about other kinds of things that get in the way of that communion? So we need to dwell a little bit because it's alcoholic also. How do these men hear from God? Because God upbraids those false prophets and he says, I didn't send them and yet they run. I didn't give them words and yet they say, sayeth the Lord.

They never heard it from me. They never received it in the place of my counsel. They were never in the place of my counsel.

So let's speculate. What does it mean? Where is that place? How is it to be obtained and maintained? What contends against it? I can tell you this. There's nothing more opposed than finding God in the secret place.

And there's nothing more difficult either to find or to maintain. So what is involved then? How do we need to understand that to appreciate this? How to find the places of quiet and undistractedness in which the Lord can be heard? And can it be heard in the midst of tumult? If you don't have ideal conditions that are sacrosanct in which the phone does not ring and the Englishman is not having you to come down to because the washing machine is out or does that mean that you're going to have the ideal condition? Can you hear God in the midst of tumult and noise and consternation and hear his distinct voice? All of this is hinted at, but we need to appreciate it and to know such places ourselves. The sine qua non, the essential requirement of hearing God is to come without any requirement of your own, any desire of your own that you would hear something of a special kind that favors you.

You come with nothing. You come without an opinion. You come without an issue that you're to be confirmed by him, that you already have a view and you're wanting his validation.

You've got to come with nothing, that whatever he speaks, it can be received. If you come with a qualification by which you need to be confirmed or you want to hear something of a special kind for your own gratification already, you're in a place where you cannot hear. We must come to God without a condition so that what he says, however different from our expectation, however unpleasing to our own expectation can be received.

But if we come with a condition where we want to be confirmed or encouraged or we already are disqualified. So this is a requirement for prophetic hearing, is to come before God without an iota of self-interest that needs somehow to be confirmed or blessed or validated. You simply come.

If we are prophetic, then we must necessarily have a handle on this new crisis and something from God about it. But we have nothing. What does the scripture say? He'll do nothing without first telling his prophets? Well, he didn't tell us.

But what if people are looking to you with expectancy? Will you be motivated to kind of produce something to gratify their curiosity? He's not spoken. I have no special insight. He's not communicated anything to me about with regard to this present crisis.

We mustn't be prompted by human expectation or to satisfy the requirement of others that expect something from us. As I've already said, the Lord has not spoken with and there's nothing for us to say. What if we have to go through the longest seasons of silence in a time of upset and crisis in which people would expect that you would have a particular prophetic insight, but you don't have it? Can you yet be at peace and disappoint people in their expectations rather than be prompted to soullessly venture something out of yourself that's not God? So it requires a remarkable separation from any necessity to be recognized, to be heard, to be applauded, and to suffer long seasons of silence in which, although the Lord may be speaking through others, he's not speaking through you, and you're not going to venture or volunteer anything that has been prompted out of your own soul that he himself has not given.

We have to be jealous and respect the silence and not break it out of giving answer to the expectation of others as if we have some reputation of necessity to maintain. We have to be a disappointment, not only to others, but often to ourselves and wonder why it is that we're not hearing and that he's not saying, but he's not explaining, to be dead and hid with Christ in God until his life is revealed, and when it's revealed, it's revealed unto glory. So to be content to remain in that place without distinction, without being conspicuous, you have nothing to say, you look like a dead duck, you're embarrassing in your silence, people thought that you were some kind of oracle, and you have nothing to communicate, and you have to

abide in that place until his life is revealed.

You'll notice that when it comes, it'll not come according to your convenience or the desires of men, it'll come according to the moment of his choosing, and you're content to wait for that. A. W. Tozer was a remarkable prophetic voice for the generation, and a real critic in the best sense of directions, things taking place in evangelical Christendom that have since become more established that were he alive today, he would be pained and affected. But even in his own time, in the 1960s, he talks about a Christianity that demands glamour and fast-flowing dramatic action.

A generation of Christians reared among push buttons and automatic machines is impatient of slower and less direct methods of reaching goals. We've been trying to apply machine-age methods to our relations with God. We read our chapter, have our short devotions, and rush away hoping to make up for our deep, inward bankruptcy.

The tragic results of this spirit are all about us. Shallow lives, hollow religious philosophies, the preponderance of the element of fun and gospel meanings, the glorification of men, trust in religious externalities, quasi-religious fellowships, salesmanship methods, the mistaking of dynamic personality for the power of the spirit, these and such as these are the symptoms of an evil disease, a deep and serious malady of the soul. That really is prophetic, because what he's foreseeing now has come in much greater measure, and is widely accepted.

How about the mistaking of dynamic personality as being the power of the spirit? How many have a gift of gab, TV evangelists, and a certain kind of, what's the word, a resonance in electric, a vitality, a high-pitched, high-tension form of delivery, which is construed to be anointed? So, can we discern, can we see through gift of gab and humanly-wired excitement as against genuine anointing and words that are tempted and given of God? And in fact, is the whole system of TV, and the necessity for recurrent broadcasts and audiences and support, part of the evil of a system that breeds and encourages the thing that's false? Such things did not exist in the times of old, when men had a ministry that needed to be continued publicly, and have something to say each time of an exciting kind. They waited on the Lord, they were quiet until they were called for. We need to understand the whole system has come in that is contrary to the thing that is authentic about propheticness, and has come in with such a bang as to become the accepted mode.

And those men use words like apostolic and prophetic as if they have a full right to the use of those words, and somehow represent them. So, I'm trying to be judicious and not be mean-spirited, but we would be foolish not to recognize that something is coming, as has come, as spreading like a great billow, a wave, over the whole of our evangelical Christendom, that is called apostolic and prophetic, and is highly suspect. And that many of us are in so naive and shallow a condition, that we think that these men are anointed, and we think that the gift of gab is oracular speaking.

We need to grow in discernment, and pray against this public thing that is cheapening the church, the image of God in the church, and raise up again the kind of thing that we're discussing, which is so rare. That if it comes, it's not likely to be broadcast, not likely to be public, not likely to be popular, that I've almost come to the place where something is popular, and suddenly popular, and becomes a bestseller for a year and a half on the Times bestseller list, that ipso facto, there's something suspicious about it. So, Tozer was already sensing these directions.

Every one of us in this room have had occasions where we have been compelled to be in situations of a kind, where we feel ourselves to be freaks. Everybody else seems to be having a ball, they're all shouting amen and hallelujah, and strangely we are untouched in our spirits, and yet we have to suffer the painful tension of standing out like the proverbial sore thumb, and not being one of the boys going along with the flow, as if there's something wrong with us, when in actuality there might be something right. So, I'm raising the question, can you bear being a freak? Can you bear being strange? Can you bear being out of it, and not moving with the consensus of the flow? Because it raises the question, either you're terribly right, or terribly wrong.

And it may well, is something wrong with me? Lord, am I out of the spirit? Why am I not being moved? So, I want to, as I've said so many times in occasions like this, guard your heart, keep your spirit, but with all diligence, don't open up to the infiltration of soulish things, just to go along and to be one with the many. That means you'll stand out conspicuously, and even be visibly obvious to those on the platform who see that you're not moved by what is moving others, and will be offended by what you represent, even in your silence. I can't count the occasions where I've had to bear that, and I'm sure that you have also.

So, it calls for a certain kind of inward strength, a certain kind of willingness to bear being a pilgrim, stranger, and sojourner in the earth, even in the realm of Christendom, and that you don't allow yourself to be open and affected, let alone swept up and into some dubious, questionable thing that purports to be the operation of spirit, that is pure soul. Because once you do, you've paid a price more than you can know, and you've dulled your inner man, and you'll be less apt to resist at a future time, and more quickly to be sucked in to a whole charismatic realm by which you'll be entirely compromised. So, we have a strange, you guys that are related to us would come to a place like this, we have a very strange situation where we're required to stand out like the conspicuous thumb, like the square peg in a round joint.

We're out of it. We're not one of the boys. We don't go along.

We don't play the game. We don't accommodate ourselves. If our spirit is not being touched by something that is issued and emanating by the spirit, we do not allow our souls to counterfeit being affected.

We don't need a tear. We don't need an excitement. We keep ourselves, even if we look like death warmed up, rather than to go along with the dubious thing that is taking place that is called the operation of the spirit, and has its origin in the souls of men, which is to say, in the last analysis, its origin from the pit.

Keep your heart, keep your spirit with all diligence. Cherish the history that you have in God. Cherish what has been framed in your inner man through fidelity, through carefulness, through experience with the Lord that you cherish.

You don't want it compromised or adversely affected by some flashy thing that is now coming down the pike and is trying to draw you in at the cost of compromising this inner integrity. Keep this thing, for this is the issue of truth. This is the issue of reality.

This is the issue of hearing from God. This is the issue of communion with God. If you lose that, you lose that proximity, you lose that closeness, and the loss is incalculable.

So be jealous to preserve the integrity of your inner man. There's a price to pay for not going along with the flow, because I have observed some of the most significant evangelical men going along with the flow,

and they have been compromised. They've lost something, and when I meet them, somehow our eyes meet in a moment, and it's like, cats, you make me uncomfortable.

In your silence, what you represent is an indictment, and you've not gone this way. So, there's a price to pay for your inward integrity, and I'm encouraging you to recognize it, it will cost you something, but you must preserve it at all costs. In the end, it is the hope of the church itself.

Part of the low condition of the church today is that it does not even distinguish between the gift of prophecy and the office of prophet, so that anyone who has a gift of prophecy is called an oracle, is called the prophet of the hour. He has no qualification, he has no office at all, so low is our ability to distinguish between these two things. A prophet should be an inspired preacher.

Preaching itself is a holy phenomenon. It's more than oratorical ability. It's a special kind of communication.

It's exquisite. It's out-of-the-heart-of-God preaching. There's a uniqueness of that phenomenon, and if we lose our respect and esteem for the preached word, we are already in a place of dangerous decline.

And so we need to distinguish between the gift of gab, filling the air with sound and with much words, as against inspired preaching, proclamation out-of-the-heart-of-God, exposition, the creative word, that when it comes, is more than just instruction. When it comes, it's event. Something happens in the hearing of the inspired word that changes, that creates a reality that was not there before.

That's what Paul speaks of in Romans 10, that Jews are waiting for an apostolic word. For how shall they believe in him of whom they've not heard, and how shall they hear, except one preach? For faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. They're waiting for a proclamation of a particular kind, in the hearing of which their ancient prejudices are displaced, and they experience an ability to believe that the word itself creates the faith to believe for that which until then was rejected.

So proclamation inspired preaching, ultimate, ultimate. So we would do well to hear fewer words and yet more precious, and to esteem the remarkable phenomenon, and those that are called to bear such words, and to provide an environment of encouragement for their growth in knowing that they're not going to automatically come to a place of full stature, that in the early expression of their calling is likely to be a mixed bag. Something of themselves, something of God, something immature, something intemperate, for which they need to be corrected perhaps, so that there's a process.

We need an environment conducive to the bringing forth of prophetic men and prophetic proclamation, which contains a patience for them when they're yet in their not mature state, when they're in the process of becoming, because if we shut them out, or condemn them, or criticize them severely, we are prematurely cutting off a subsequent gift to the church. So can we bear it? Can we separate the good thing from the immature thing, and bring a word of encouragement through saying, we appreciated what you said brother, but when you touched this point, we felt that now you were lapsing into yourself, and really expressing something personal. Well, oh really? I didn't see that.

You see the kind of atmosphere that we need in the church, if we are to be appreciative of an environment conducive to prophetic men, and to prophetic proclamation, and the preached word, preaching itself as a sacred phenomenon, because when the preached word comes, are we receiving it as the word of man, or the word of God? And are we receiving it so as to be changed? Are we receiving it in a personal way? Will

we do it? Will we obey that word? Will we take it to heart? Because if we're just shallow hearers, and are just being entertained by the music of it, the Lord will not be as quick next time to bring the preciousness of that speaking. We'll find our atmosphere dry, and that the word of God is a rarer phenomenon, because we have not been appreciative and receptive of the word as coming from God, so as to do it. To hear the word of God is to be brought under a special obligation of requirement.

But if we are dismissing it as only something nice to be heard, or entertaining, or stimulating, but not making a requirement, we are missing the genius of the word. God is not speaking for effect. He's speaking to effect change.

We've got to hear that word, and apply it, and do it. And if we will, we're likely then to hear again, so precious speaking. That is to say, that the issue of the preached word is not just the issue of the preacher, but the issue of the hearers.

More than you can know, the condition of a congregation, what its corporate condition is, its maturity, its soul, its spirit, its carnality, very much affects what comes out of the man who's addressing them. So I can tell you, part of the suffering of the prophetic man is when his word comes back in his teeth, when his word falls to the ground, when his word is stopped at his mouth before it is even expressed, because there's an unwillingness in the congregation to hear and to receive. It's an anguish to be choked up.

But on the other hand, conversely, it's a glory where there's a people who draw out God's very heart. For often the oracular prophetic man will hear himself in dimensions beyond any intention of his own, and things will issue out of him that he himself had not forethought nor considered, that are coming out spontaneously in the moment, because the people themselves are drawing out God's very heart. The church does not know that it itself is one of the principal factors in the quality of the word that comes to it.

Its condition affects what it hears and what it receives. And knowing that, with what attitude and what spirit ought we to come together in congregational settings, anticipating and desiring to hear the word of God? Have we just toppled out of bed? We've had no devotional time, and we come in whatever condition, hoping for some spiritual roulette, that something will be said that will give us a lift? Or have we sought the Lord before we come to the meeting? Is our spirit prepared? Are we in a place to hear and draw out God's heart? So we need to come to a deepened respect for the word as being God's word, preaching as a sacred phenomenon, not for our entertainment, but for our change, both for time and for eternity. And it will very much affect what is given and what we hear and receive, and whether we will go on from faith to faith, or glory to glory, or be fixed in our still stubborn place of immaturity.

The church is in its low condition for the want of the hearing of the word of God. There's a famine for the hearing of the word of God presently. There's much speaking.

There's profuse speaking. The gift of gab, men have an ability, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But the word of God, the sacred word, the preached word, that is rare.

And we are a factor in that phenomenon. We need to spend a few moments on the subject of reality. Have you noticed the conflicting subjectivities to be found in the church? The greatest anguish over the years is, this one has that opinion, and has scripture to support it.

This one has this view, that view. What is truth? What is the truth of a situation? What is the objective reality? So, if we cannot discuss the phenomenon of propheticness independent of the subject of reality,

because if a prophet is anything, he is eminently real. But what does that mean? And how is that obtained? And how is reality maintained? Because there are so many forces working to subvert reality and to bring us to a place that is false or shallow.

So, a jealousy for reality, because that's God, where he is. Let me read a little something to you again from Tozer. By definition also, God is real.

He is real in the absolute and final sense that nothing else is. All other reality is contingent upon his. The great reality is God, the author of that lower and dependent reality which makes up the sum of created things, including ourselves.

God has objective existence, independent of and apart from any notions which we may have concerning him. The worshipping heart does not create its object. It finds him here when it wakes from its mortal slumber in the morning of its regeneration.

Imagination projects unreal images out of the mind and seeks to attach reality to them. Faith creates nothing. It simply reckons upon that which is already there.

We need to say something about reality, and to love reality, because the things that are real are not always pleasant. In fact, they're often painful. But if we shrink from reality because of its pain, we're losing the foundation, the understructure of everything.

There's got to be a love for what is real, even when it's painful, or maybe especially when it's painful, because if we shrink from that, we'll be moved into the realms of the things that are imagined rather than real, and we lose contact with God, who is the utter foundation of reality itself. So, to say something, what is reality? Do you contend for it? Do you see it as an issue? Are there times when you're tempted to hedge, to compromise, to look away, to read or see something and give it a different kind of valuation? What is the truth of something? Ultimate reality. What if in the final reaches of our supposed spirituality, there we are found to be false? I'm talking over my head now.

Let me try and fill that out. What if in the area where we thought ourselves so supremely spiritual, we come to recognize that there is deceit? There is an imagined superiority which is not true. For example, we're not given to judgment and we're superior to judgment because we see more compassionately the issues that have gone into the situation, and we take a view that is much more majestic and magnanimous than those who are narrowly insisting on judgment.

But this so-called spiritual superiority can be itself false. Do we have the courage to have that falsity identified and reject what is more dear to us than life itself, our own supposed spirituality? Unless you're jealous in this way, you're not a candidate for reality. Unless you yourself can be dealt with severely in the places you want most to God and has most to do with your own image of yourself, you're in the place of unreality, and it will ultimately show itself, though now it purports to be a supreme form of spirituality.

Do we have an atmosphere of reality in the church where we don't have to put our best foot forward, where we are what we are by the grace of God and that we would freely express before our brothers and sisters without embarrassment and can be received in that condition with love? The issue of reality is the issue of the church. If the church is phony, puffed up, if its worship is hyped up, if it's creating and maintaining an aura of a spirituality that is not real, then what are we as the church? So I'm jealous for the word. So Greg Connell, of course, we're likely to be in error even as we're bringing correction.

Though the correction itself might be true, it itself is wrong if it's not issuing from a redemptive heart that desires the best for the other and is not exalting itself at the price of the other. But wouldn't it be wonderful if the atmosphere of the church itself was a corrective? That the reality of the church is so prominent, the collective atmosphere by souls that are living in truth, that if there's any deviant thing, any false spirituality, by contrast it will become evident and bring its own correction. So until that time we're told to speak the truth in love and we need to exhort, rebuke, and correct one another.

But I'd like to visualize a church in which having practiced that, that the atmosphere is so redolent with reality that what is unreal will in a moment be conspicuous and uncomfortable. And we'd be willing to be rid of it and come to the true place. But we've got to love reality.

We've got to love what is true, what is earnest, what is authentic, and shun counterfeit appearance, pseudo-spirituality, affectation appearances, false anointing, being impressive, being spiritual. That the very nature of what God is about in his redemptive sanctifying work requires a greater frequency of life together and a more earnest environment in which we can be to each other what we ought. Churches is the ultimate thing and requires ultimate sacrifice, ultimate attention, ultimate giving of ourselves that we have made church the place of convenience for a Sunday hour that does not disrupt our going to the golf course or the ball game or whatever, indicates what a low premium church has in our view and for which reason the purposes of God in fitting our souls both for time and eternity is lost and why the church is in its present carnal condition.

So the church is the place where this sanctifying thing takes place and the environment indeed where apostolic and prophetic men can be both recognized, encouraged, and brought to places of maturity and sent out to exercise their office in the world and the church outside. And maybe a final statement for today and we'll be continuing tomorrow in this subject is the prophetic man, the apostolic man is the thing in himself through and through. It's what he is in himself so that even when he's silent he stands for something.

You may have heard this reference that as a young believer, still a teacher in California, witnessing to my colleagues and one day at the lunch table eating silently, the woman at the other side of the table is visibly edgy and getting irritated. I'm watching her out of the corner of my eye. She can't sit still.

A Jewish woman. She's on drugs. She's taking pills.

She's in an illicit adulterous relationship with one of the other faculty members and I'm not saying a word and finally she looks like she said, even when you're silent Cass, you're a living accusation. So I've always been reminded that the man is the thing in himself even when he's silent. There's a reality that pervades the entire being.

He's real. He's true through and through. He lives in the spirit of truth.

He shuns the things that are false. He receives the correction, the admonition of God through the church. He's close to the heart of God, the proximity.

He does not desire reputation. He has no need to be heard or to be seen. He can be silent and can be set aside for any length of time without feeling that somehow he has been dropped of God or he's out of the purposes of God.

He has no agenda of his own to commend. We need to cherish this phenomenon because it is the symbol and the prototype of the entire church. Imagine a church like this, precious, quiet, reserved, having no agenda and yet of ultimate significance to the community of the world because it sees with a depth of insight and speaks with an accuracy of the things that are at hand for which the world needs to be warned by those who have the sense of the imminence and weight of these things.

The church itself is called to be a prophetic presence in the world. So all that we're saying today about the prophetic man is appropriate in measure to the church itself at large. Such a requirement.

Let's pray that that which is dubious, specious, questionable, fake will be revealed as such and men will forsake these appearances. The ironic thing is they may well be called. They may be their own worst enemies.

And out of the flesh and out of their soul, promoting a kind of pseudo-identity that is contrary to what God would have given if only they would lay off and not promote their own identity. But what it is, we desperately need what is true. We desperately need the revival of the sacred word, of the preached inspired word.

We need the testimony, we need the presence of men who bear the very aura of the truth and whose very silence is a ministry, let alone their speaking. So Lord, we just bow before you. This was your subject today and we know that it's holy.

And we haven't given it the contemplation that we ought and indeed the holy calling in our time has fallen. And men speak of movements as if something can be fabricated by men or they're legislating or franchising or establishing each other as being this or being that in callings which you have never given. And we're paying a price for that Lord.

The whole of the church is being subverted. But the worst thing is that you are being subverted and the esteem for yourself as holy has gone down with the low place of the prophetic call itself. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

So Lord, we're asking that we would be factors in raising again the high calling. And being ourselves candidates, my God, to be such. Grant us that love, my God, for truth, for reality, the willingness to be dealt with, to have the work, my God, of the cross upon our flesh in anything that is impatient and ambitious, particularly when it's religious.

And the willingness, my God, to be identified in the places where we are ultimately phony, where we think ourselves most spiritual and to bear the shock of that revelation and be willing to be chastised and brought down by it to a place of reality and truth. So, my God, we love you. You're earnest.

You're a true God. You're reality itself. So come, Lord, help us in this, that our prayers itself will be a factor in restoring the true calling, Lord, for the hour is urgent and we need again to hear the word of God and the voice of God.

Come, precious God, and give answer, we pray in Jesus' name.

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