

# Preachers of Righteousness

by Art Katz

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*Art Katz's sermon emphasizes the critical role of preachers in delivering God's word and the church's responsibility in fostering an environment for true preaching.*

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 33:7-9, Matthew 5:14-16, Romans 10:14-15, 1 Corinthians 1:21, 1 Thessalonians 2:4, 2 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 4:12, James 3:1, 1 Peter 4:11, 2 Peter 2:5

**Topics:** "Righteousness", "Preaching"

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## Description

Art Katz emphasizes the critical role of preachers of righteousness in delivering God's word, which should not be diluted to please audiences but should challenge and provoke spiritual maturity. He highlights the need for preachers to be vessels of divine truth, understanding that their messages carry eternal significance and require a response from the congregation. Katz warns against the worldly compromises that can dilute the preached word, urging both preachers and listeners to recognize the weight of their responsibilities in the proclamation of God's truth. He calls for a church environment that supports and nurtures true preaching, which often involves discomfort and a call to deeper faith. Ultimately, Katz stresses that the effectiveness of preaching lies in the authenticity and spiritual depth of the preacher, who must be willing to endure suffering and sacrifice for the sake of delivering God's message.

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## Transcript

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A message given by Art Katz to a group of pastors and lay leaders in Phoenix, Arizona on Dec. 9th, 2000. It is a message given principally to those who have the task of bringing the word of God to their fellowships. But because of the generally worldly nature of church life, pastors are often compromised to bring biblically correct messages that appeal to their audiences instead of a word that brings requirement--and therefore lose the very means by which maturity can be gained.

I believe that God wants to make a statement concerning the phenomenon of the preached word, not only for those who are responsible for bringing the word of God, but also for the whole church at large. In my observation, we do not adequately esteem the spoken word as being the word of God. We do not

understand what 'preaching the word' means or the condition of the vessel that brings it. It is the responsibility of the church to provide the environment and atmosphere conducive to bringing the word of God.

When I say 'word of God,' I am not speaking about a biblical message. It is better understood as the appointed and express word that God Himself gives. I have therefore entitled this essay, Preachers of Righteousness. The thing that makes any preacher righteous is that he is not speaking his own word. The word is not his own; it is God's, and that alone is what makes it righteous - in the refusal to speak out of his own capability and savvy. It is a phenomenon that has been so little addressed by the church.

There is hardly any understanding of the dynamic and great weight of the divine things between God and man involved in true proclamation. While the world may have its oratory, it is only in the church that the phenomenon of true proclamation is found. Preaching is a divine function; it is a phenomenon that needs to be respected, esteemed, cherished, prayed and travailed for. True preaching as the word of God can only be proclaimed by a preacher of righteousness. It means that a divine perspective is being brought to men on the earth, and more often than not, in the earth.

It is a collision between perspectives and value systems. When God speaks He is not speaking to adorn, support or endorse what is in the world or earthly. He is bringing a heavenly perspective unique to Himself. It is a divine perspective. And invariably that perspective is at odds or at enmity with that which prevails as the conventional and acceptable wisdom of the world. God 'turns over the apple cart' of those things that are cherished, esteemed and held dear by men - even in the church.

The church is called to be pilgrims, strangers and sojourners in the world. And not the least of the functions of preaching is to stab God's sleeping people into an awareness of the degree to which they have unconsciously succumbed to the world and its values. One of the functions of the church is to 'blow the whistle' and to reveal the farce, the falsity, the charade, and the whole deceptive mechanism that constitutes the world. God is in complete opposition to the conventional wisdom of the world.

And if we knew it and were hearing that kind of word and receiving it, we ourselves would also be in opposition with the world. We ourselves would be uncomfortable and know our pilgrim status and know that we are here for certain purposes. Are we agitated in our spirit like righteous Lot? Are we exacerbated by the evil all around us? It will take courage to bring a word of that kind because even within the church itself there is a vested interest in its own self-perpetuation.

It does not want to have its apple cart turned over. And in order to continue the vices by which it is sustained - often the gifts, offerings, tithes of its members - it shrinks therefore from offending. But the word of God in its essence is an offense. So, for a man to bring such a word, and threaten his own security by upsetting those who are paying his bill, is almost a contradiction in terms. To compound the predicament, many preachers themselves are so ensconced in the system that they do not see the necessity for a word of this kind.

They could not even conceive of it, let alone bring it. For this reason, the preached word will be resisted and unwelcome. It brings a heavenly view into the earthly place. This means that there will be every kind of powerful opposition by the world's powers of darkness. They want to retain or allow their wisdom to be accepted as normative. The world and its system trivialize the things that are ultimate and absolute and make absolute and ultimate the things that are trivial.

It seeks to diminish the solemn and significant things of God - even to keep them from consideration. It is a complete turning of things upside down. The function of preaching is to set them right. True preaching is to bring the divine perspective to bear in a way that will affect men's understanding and their lives. A plumb-line has dropped from heaven, and adjustments will have to be made with the word that has come. You cannot go on with 'business as usual.' One of the ways in which I know whether the word that proceeds out of my mouth has been received is to see to what degree men will continue with 'business as usual' after the word.

If the word that is preached makes no requirement, it is not God's word. It can be biblically correct, it can be a wonderful homily, it can encompass biblical themes, but if it makes no demand, it is not the word of God. God will not send His word into the earth that we should be amused and entertained. His word requires, and invariably it is a radical requirement. And for that reason we hear so little of a true preached word, for men do not want to be required of, or require of others what they would not have required of themselves.

One of my great complaints about the church is how little it requires of its members. And therefore it is essentially a passive 'pay-the-bill,' 'come-for-our-Sunday-fix' and go home with nothing really altered. Our witness is therefore almost negligible. We do not constitute an island of reality in a sea of unreality. We are so one with that unreality that we cannot distinguish the voice of God when it comes. We are not attuned to hear a word that calls us into the heavenly perspective in order that we might live a heavenly life while in the earth.

Such a word would occasion an opposition if not a persecution to those who bring it - as well as upon those who receive it. So we intuitively shrink from hearing and considering the word, which if taken seriously would invite an opposition from the powers of darkness. God says that it pleased Him "through the foolishness of preaching" to save them that would believe. We need to know that preaching is the epitome of foolishness. If we do not know it as that, we do not know what true preaching is.

God entrusts a heavenly word to proceed out of earthly lips, out of a man who is dust and who knows it, and who is so aware of his frailty. For the true preacher of righteousness, the proclamation of the word is always an urgent issue of life and death. He feels that it is a once-and-for-all moment that will not be given again. He sees it not as a sermon but that very eternity is at stake. And that is the way we ought also to feel who are hearing that word. The proclamation of the word is not the exclusive responsibility of the speaker; there is also a responsibility put on the people who are hearing it, so as to draw it out of God's very heart as something cherished.

It makes a world of difference what the attitude of that corporate fellowship is. If they are sitting with arms folded, looking cynical, looking at their watches, thinking that it is 'just another sermon,' then that is exactly what they will get. But if they feel that this is a once-and-for-all occasion that will not be given again and that the man who has come has been sent, then it will affect the character and the quality of the word that issues out of the man's mouth. A lot of us, who are mumbling under our breaths and holding the preacher at fault for the failure really to deliver the goods, do not know to what degree we are affecting the spoken word.

The Lord may be chastening an entire fellowship by the diminishing of the word through the minister, who accepts it as being somehow his own failure. It is a humiliation that he has to bear in the office that he is functioning in. It may be the result of his own failure, but equally that of the fellowship that fails to

understand the significance of the spoken word. What we do on Saturday night or before a meeting will adversely affect our ability to hear the word and respond to it.

If we were watching television and think nothing of indulging ourselves in totally unspiritual conduct, and think that the pastor will bring the goods the next morning, then we will be dulling our spirits. God will not accommodate an attitude of indifference or carnal mindset. We should be up the night before on our knees, if not our faces, praying for the word the next day. Do we see the word as mere instruction, or do we live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God?

We ought to be bearing the speaker up and identify with him in the peculiarity of his calling. We should be sensing his trembling and frailty. We are in something together, and we have got to know it and pull together if we want the true word of God. And God is not going to give it if He sees a heart that is not willing to be changed by the word or even suffer its inconvenience. The preacher of righteousness therefore has an unwelcome task. It is a task of an ultimate kind that requires an ultimate anointing, lest it be dismissed as merely something interesting or moving.

It is God speaking through a man that requires a man's life. Something is at stake in the hearing of the word. Those who heard Paul at Mars Hill were eternally accountable to God for that hearing. To hear an apostle once is enough to be held responsible for that word and its eternal consequence. The whole atmosphere of church life and the whole corporate character of church would be elevated, deepened, made more serious, and made more significant if we rightly understood the phenomenon of preaching.

Not least would be the giving of ourselves in prayerful support of those who are called to this remarkable and awesome task. The man who brings the word is at the same time himself the message. You cannot disassociate the one from the other. He is not some kind of antiseptic, impartial mechanism with a voice that God happens to employ. He is a living organism, and the word's credibility and power of penetration are altogether related to the truth of the man who is bringing the message.

If he himself has not lived it, if he himself is unwilling for the cost of it, then his word will fall to the ground. It will be an interesting word, but it will not be requiring. He is for that reason a candidate for the dealings of God and the sifting that the requirements of God necessarily call for. You cannot require of others what you have not given yourself. The proclamation of the word is not a professional function but spiritual. The man is integral to the word he proclaims.

It may well be that we are getting shallow words because the men who are speaking are living shallow lives. They have kept their defenses up. They have kept themselves safely from the kinds of challenges and threats that would have deepened their knowledge of God in the school of suffering. They are unwilling to enter the fellowship of the Christ's suffering. They do not want to suffer humiliation and disappointment. And so they guard their lives in such a way that keeps them from the imprint of God, and therefore they cannot conceive of the kind of word that requires.

In a word, the true preacher is a sufferer. He not only suffers while he brings the word, but there has also been a necessary history of suffering that has preceded it. I am suspicious of any man who comes to the pulpit and who has every appearance of 'having it all together' and can hardly wait to open his Bible to let forth. I doubt whether such a one is a preacher of righteousness. A disposition that is meek and lowly is more appropriate. In Spurgeon's generation the pulpit was called the 'Holy Desk.'

You were coming up to a sacred responsibility to which no man was capable. But the pulpit now has become only a piece of furniture where you place your bible and papers. The first function of the word is death. It is a word that must necessarily kill before it makes alive. It is a word that cuts and wounds before it heals. But if you are a nice guy and don't want to offend anybody, then you void any possibility of life being ministered. If you cannot bear to see anyone made uncomfortable and you therefore refrain from the cutting, you disqualify yourself as a preacher.

The true preacher of righteousness needs therefore to have had the experience of the pain of death in himself that enables him to bring the word of death. Only then can it become the word of life. If he is self-conscious about how he is being received and understood, he can forget about any redemptive word of life. He has got to be dead, both to the rebuke and rejection of God's people, as well as their praise. We can void the word of God as being the word of God whenever there is any Cross-avoidance or where there is any unwillingness to suffer disappointment, and even an unwillingness to bring pain.

We live in a kind of a patsy, religious culture that wants the whole thing to take place in one meeting so that the people can go home happy. And the pastors who are acting out of their pastoral concern do not want to see the congregation agitated or offended. They want the whole thing nicely wrapped and packaged and delivered in one meeting. But often the man of God brings a word that is not going to send the people home happy; he may send them home disturbed or perplexed and let them steep in the death of that word.

In contradistinction, our whole culture is instant and pleasure-oriented. It avoids pain and suffering, which is another way of saying it avoids the Cross. And so the service has got to be an enjoyment, not an agitation that leaves people with unanswered questions. The preacher has got to live with the tension that however much he has prepared himself and felt assured that this was the word of God, he may well have missed it. Or even if he brings it, he may well have corrupted it by some inadvertent thing that will slip out in the course of his speaking.

It might even have the effect of dulling the word or even contradicting it, or give the hearer a reason to abdicate from the responsibility of the word because they have found something defective in what the speaker said. It is an uncanny kind of suffering that is unique to preaching and the function of the preacher. It is like walking through a minefield. God's people are instinctively looking for a flaw or a failure in the speaker so that they will have grounds to invalidate the word itself.

So the man has got to live with the tension of that framework of understanding. The sense of weakness, the sense of infirmity and the sense of frailty are intrinsic to the preaching. The man may look virile and sound authoritative, but in his own heart and experience, he is fully aware that he is a "son of man." He is susceptible to the nature of man and its weakness. And even if he is speaking correctly he is yet capable of corrupting his own word by some inadvertent illustration, a wrong inflection, or some kind of thing that will remove the obligation of his hearers to take that word seriously.

It is a remarkable tension. But I would say that a Christian is one who has voluntarily given himself to the understanding that living with tension is a form of suffering intrinsic to the life of faith itself. Paul speaks about "preaching Christ." This does not mean that every message has got to be 'about' Him. The true preaching of Christ more often than not is implicitly a Christ-centered message even when He is not explicitly the subject of it. If it truly is the word of God, then Christ is being preached.

What He is in Himself, what He represents in Himself, the essence of His divinity and humanity is being set forth in the word - even if the subject is, for example, about Israel. Much can be said of the preparation of a preacher, not in the shaping of his message, but the shaping of his character, his life, and his own relationship with God. He needs a private, personal, unseen, devotional time with God on a daily basis. What the man is publicly is altogether a statement of what he is in private.

If there is no authentic, daily, continuous and devotional life at the onset of the day, then there is little likelihood of being the bearer of the word. That is why we can hear the same message from two different speakers. We yawn at the one as it goes over our head or bounces off harmlessly, while the other man is gripping and penetrating. The difference between the two is that the latter has a continuous, daily intercourse with God in devotion. And devotion is not devotion if you are going before the Lord for the express purpose of finding a text or a message for the day.

That is a utilitarian spirit; it is a commercial transaction and no longer a true devotion. While it was yet dark and before the daybreak, Jesus was with the Father in a communion of prayer in a devotional relationship. It was not for the purpose of receiving instruction for the day. But when the daylight had broken and the demands came down, what had been wrought in His private devotion would then be expressed throughout the rest of that day. If you are a religious professional, you will not have the time for that kind of devotional life.

You would be too busy with a multitude of details, and therefore that neglect will be reflected in the lack of authority and penetration in the word that is preached. The preacher of righteousness will trust the Lord for the word to be given. If the Lord is giving the word, He will be the Alpha and the Omega of it. He gives the beginning, which is usually creaky, and He will also bring the end. Preachers like that don't grow on a tree; they come out of a fellowship. And their first and early messages are usually an admixture of flesh and Spirit.

He needs, therefore, a loving environment that can bring correction to his attention at the appropriate moment. And he can hear and receive because it is not calculated to shoot him down, but to encourage his growth and maturity. The church itself is a key factor, providing an environment in which proclaimers of God's word come forth. The bringing forth of the preachers of righteousness in the Last Days is an exquisite work of God. But it will not take place without the participation of saints who understand the drama and the significance of it and are willing to give themselves in encouragement in the bringing forth of such men and their word.

There needs to be a bearing with him because he is often going to be ungainly and frequently speak at the wrong time. He may even spoil an otherwise good service! So it takes maturity in a people that are not service or success-oriented to bear with such a man over a process of time, till he comes to a place where he can bring the word of God to a people. The preacher of righteousness brings not only the word of God, but also the voice of God. How often do we hear those scriptures in God's lament over Israel, "They failed to heed my voice..."

There is something about the texture of God's voice that comes forth in true preaching. The word brings a dimension, a cogency and a seriousness in its sounding. You can almost tell where a man is in the realm of the Spirit by the timbre of his voice. It is an index of the depth of God's working in that man that will affect in a personal way how his voice comes forth. The man is caught up with the word. The voice of God and the word of God that comes forth are a statement of the proximity of that man to God over a long

course of time.

It will reflect his willingness to bear the dealings of God that have dug deep and sifted, and refined him. Obedience to speak the words of God implies that even the expression of those words be in the mood which God Himself gives - not our own more acceptable mood or disposition. Our life is not our own; our mood is not our own; our emotions are not are own. Therefore God has to have the full possession of mind, body, soul, and spirit. Something needs to go forth to raise up men who will bear the word of the Lord, preachers of righteousness, in every locality in this final generation - men that are willing for the 'school of preaching,' for the dealings of God, for the Cross of God and for the sufferings of God.

The word of the Lord needs to go forth out of mouths that can be trusted in order that God's people can be fed, nourished, nurtured, challenged, changed, prepared, and fitted for the Last Days' obligations upon the church. There are requirements and mandates called for, especially to cynical, rationalistic Jews. They will need to see a demonstration, even in the spoken word, that indicates something more than mere oratory. They need to see a heavenly discourse coming down from above, incarnate, being expressed through man. Amen!

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