

The Prophetic Word

by Art Katz

Art Katz emphasizes the prophetic call to see and speak God's Word with faith and obedience, acknowledging the struggles and significance of this role.

Duration: 1:19:21

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:4-18, Psalm 46:10, Proverbs 17:27, Isaiah 40:8, Jeremiah 20:9, Ezekiel 33:7, 2 Corinthians 4:7

Topics: "Prophetic Word"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the negative impact of the film industry and commercialization on society. He emphasizes how the pursuit of money and profit has corrupted the youth and prepared them to become cruel and heartless individuals. The preacher compares the power of money and greed to the power of God's word, suggesting that society should prioritize spiritual growth over materialistic pursuits. He also mentions a prophetic statement published in a magazine and questions whether it truly reflects the word of God.

Transcript

He had to be brought out and down by the hand of the Lord and the Spirit of God into the valley of dry bones. He had to see Israel's condition and plight, not as he would have liked to have seen it, or colored it romantically or idealistically or with a false hope. He had to see it in its grim and ugly truth as it in fact is as God himself sees it.

And only from that place could he then speak. See what I mean? Seeing precedes speaking. So the call of the prophet is to see as God sees.

And it's often painful before it's glorious. So how does the prophet see the Word of God, which is altogether a condition for speaking the Word of God, prophetically speaking it? And it's foundational and fundamental to the prophet's whole existence. If he is pre-eminently a seer, he's also pre-eminently a spokesman.

He's the mouthpiece of the living God. So his attitude toward the Word, how he views the Word, will affect how he speaks it. And one thing we know is that unlike ourselves, the prophet sees the Word of God, even issuing out of his own mouth, as an event.

We see the Word as instruction. We see the Word as descriptive. And it has that function.

But its ultimate consideration as the Word of God is that it affects something. It does something. It performs something.

The Word of God, when it comes, is an event. It raises the dead. When the Son of Man speaks to the bones, they come together.

That's not to say that it's always going to be visible to us, but it will have its effect and it will not return to the Lord void, but fulfill the purpose whereunto it is sent. So the prophet is a sent man with a sent word that will not return to God void. You may think so, and in fact part of the frustration and the suffering of the prophet, the perpetual martyrdom of the prophet, is that very often, if not invariably, it will seem as if his word has been without effect.

Men will ho-hum and look at the ceiling and look at their watches and look at their clocks and flip through pages while you're pouring out your soul and you feel like the word has gone utterly without effect. That's why Paul encourages us and reminds us that our labors are not in vain. Why does he have to say that? Because he knows very often we're going to feel like they are in vain.

And if we're going to look with our natural eye at the result of our labors or our speaking, we will shut ourselves up in a closet and not go out. We will be defeated before we begin. There will be a sense of futility like it's altogether without purpose and without effect.

So we have to have the prophetic faith that though we do not see the evidence of the word, God tells us that it's not void and it shall not return to him void. So he gives it, it comes from him and it returns to him. And we are the instrumentality through which that word is spoken.

But if we don't believe those things about the word, if we have not that prophetic faith about the word, it will not be that. Because as your faith is, so be it unto you. So what is required from us first is a renewed appreciation, an exalted view of the word.

Because if we have a debased view, what shall we expect from those who hear us? And in fact, isn't that the attitude of the congregations that come to services? They do not expect that the word that they're hearing is God's word. What they're hearing is an opinion, a man's view. It might be interesting, it might be amusing, it might be instructive, but it's not going to be an event.

It's only a man's word. So maybe it's an ultimate act of faith to believe that a word coming from a man and through a man is the word of God. All the more when we know the man.

If we didn't know him, then we would be helped because he's God's man of faith and power and he comes out of the wings mysteriously and disappears again after he delivers it. And we have more hope to believe that that could be God's word because there's a mystique. But if we know the man and see him in his humanity, see him in his weakness, in his frailty, or as God himself even teased the prophet of Ezekiel 37 and said, son of man, can these bones live? He was rubbing in to the teeth of the prophet, his own awareness of his own humanity, his own mortality, his own weakness.

So you, you will be reminded of that continually. And if the congregation has trouble to believe that the word of God is God's word through your mouth, how much greater is your problem to believe it? Can you believe the word of God through your mouth? You might believe it through art, but can you believe it through you? You know what I mean? That's the ultimate faith that God can even speak through you because who is more conversant and more familiar with your fallibility and weakness and contradiction

and defect than yourself. But isn't that the whole genius of the faith is the incarnation of God in flesh? And that God is somehow more glorified through that.

That there's more honor to God in speaking through frail vessels like Frieda at 2.30 this afternoon over a telephone than if God had thundered in Phoenix, Arizona out of the blue and thus saith the Lord King right through the ceiling. It's more glory to God to express himself through Frieda than through some kind of anonymous airy vacuum into which his voice comes. It's God in the flesh that is the glory.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels and our own faith needs to be kindled that God's word can come forth even out of us. The prophets had that exact struggle. No man was more aware of his own infirmity than the prophets of God.

Looking back now and reading them, we might think that they were great giants of faith and that they never had a moment's doubt. You could believe that they went through the same fits and the same doubts and the same struggles as ourselves. All the more when they're bearing a word of impending judgment and they're the only one bearing it.

And all of the other prophets whose credentials are as impressive or more impressive than theirs are saying exactly the opposite. No, destruction will not come. This is, after all, Israel.

Have you forgotten? This is the covenantal nation and this is Jerusalem, the sanctuary and the dwelling of God. And this is his holy temple where he said his presence would abide forever. So you have got to be wrong.

You cannot talk about destruction to that nation and to that city. God's presence is here. They're coming from another theological perspective that has a foundation in the word to sustain it.

And they're a majority and they are all saying the same thing. Only you are taking another view. So maybe you're wrong.

Maybe you're all wet and there'll be someone at your elbow to tell you that. You're all wet. Where did you get that? This is coming out of your own perverse spirit.

This is because you didn't have a happy childhood and your father was not the kind of father that would have given you a healthy foundation. And therefore there's a warp in your soul. And that's why you take a negative view.

And you're always talking about judgment because you have never been right. And so desire the best gifts. Who's going to desire to be a prophet if he has to go through this continual anguish of doubt even about himself and the word that proceeds from his own mouth.

And yet when it comes time to speak and that time does come and must come, he has got to speak. For if he withholds the word in the moment that God has appointed, the moment is lost. He might try to make it up later.

It will not be the same. He has got to be obedient and got to bring it forth against the face of all doubt, against all voices raised against it, against people falling asleep while he's speaking or looking at the ceiling or gazing at the clock or giving him looks that could kill as if he's public enemy number one and that he's a traitor to the faith and that he's false. He has still got to persist.

And that's why God says, don't look at their faces. I have made you a fortified city. Well, you're not going to feel like it in that moment.

You're going to feel like nothing other than weakness and you're still required to speak. It's the cross. That moment of obedience is a suffering.

And that's why you'll often hear men like me when they get up before they even begin speaking, what you can hear is they're signing, sighing and groaning. You can almost hear them panting. Here we go again.

Lord, a crisis moment has come and everyone, everything is conspiring against what I think your word is. I must be wrong. Everybody's rejoicing and having a ball and I'm bringing and I have this negative thought and yet the moment has come and I'm required to speak it.

So it's an obedience unto death again and again and again. But you will not do it unless you have a belief about that word. You're not just bringing a piece of information or an alternative opinion.

You're bringing God's own perspective and God's own view that if men disregard and reject that, the consequence for them is fearful. There's a weight of responsibility and it all comes together in a given moment. And it's not just a crisis time of issue of judgment.

It's like right now today, August 18th, right now at this table, what's coming forth? Is it human instruction? Well, don't get so caught up with it. Don't exaggerate. This is just a little class and we're examining a subject.

That's not the way a prophet would look at it or an apostle. For those men, every moment is an eternal moment. Every moment is charged with eternity and the issues of life and death.

They have an exaggerated, compounded and intensive view that no moment is just a moment and that we can afford to relax or it doesn't mean all that much. For them it does mean all that much and that's why it's an anguish. If it was just a casual thing, well, a man's opinion, we can afford to take it or leave it.

But if it's a moment that shall not be given again, and it's a once and for all time, and this is the way in which these foundational men perceive their moments, charged and fraught with all significance, that they would have to cry out with Paul, who is sufficient for these things? It'll crowd you into your prayer closet. It'll bring you to the cross. You'll recognize that in me is no good thing at all.

And unless God has made something available through his death and resurrection, we of all men are most to be pitied. If all we can hear is a man with his own opinion, how pathetic, how weak, how inept when we see the desperate condition of the world and the need to hear from God. So we have to become serious about have we really been crucified with Christ and died to ourselves and have risen with him to newness of life? Who is it who's speaking? Who is it who alone has the wisdom and the ability and the authority to speak a word in a crisis moment where life and death is at stake and eternity is at stake? Will that be true at 2.30 when Frieda speaks over the telephone on the issue of syncretism about Indian religion and culture and the Christian faith? Is it exaggeration to say it's life and death? It's not an exaggeration.

We may not see the life and death thing, but it will become one day a life and death issue of what my brother John will be saying in South Africa at a critical juncture will very much reflect what is being sewn into his spirit and understanding now and will be called forth at that time. And if it had, if he had not this preparation, death would have ensued rather than life. So I'm not getting dramatic.

In fact, I despise drama. I despise melodrama. I despise accentuating something unnecessarily or trying to beef something up.

We don't need that. The faith itself is charged by its very nature with eternal consequence. It's only the matter of our understanding that and taking that into our deepest spirit and the way that you will know that you've come to that understanding, which is foundational for both prophetic and apostolic men is when you will cry together with Paul, who is sufficient for these things.

When you cry that and it's a continual cry, you're always saying that if not verbally, you're crying it in your spirit. You'll know that you understand the weight of this life and its requirement. And unless there's a resurrection, unless Jesus has been raised from the dead and we with him, we of all men are most to be pitied.

For the issues are so grave, so utterly significant that they can only be answered from the ground of resurrection or not at all. Resurrection is no longer a mere issue of doctrine. It's the issue of everything.

If there's no resurrection, not only are we most to be pitied, but there's no hope for anything in the world. There's no hope through the church. It has no message.

It has no vitality. It has no authority. It has no answer.

It has only problem. It has only credo that is dry as dust that has no life giving property. Resurrection is the issue.

And we'll never see it more desperately than when we believe that the word of God is that issue. And it's that issue through us in a given moment when life and death and eternity are at stake. And that's what our life is.

And that's what our calling is. That will save us from church becoming a mere succession of Sundays and community becoming, what do you call it? Trailer houses, a trailer court. The very same physical thing can become the one or the other, depending on our attitude toward it.

It's either a trailer court where we're living in a happy rural setting and away from the noise of the cities, or it's an apostolic community fraught with the great issues that are being worked out in our own relationship. How do we see it? Prophet is one who sees as God sees. So we don't have to exaggerate anything.

The issues themselves, especially at the end of the age, we're called to the consummation of all things. And that's why there's an invisible cloud of witnesses overhead this morning. Do you believe that? Oh, come on, cats.

Now you're really going off the deep end. God would bother to dispense a cloud of witnesses over this little scrubby place because there's a handful of students around a table. He would reserve that for some more momentous occasion.

Oh, yeah. I wouldn't be surprised if Jihad Van Raad himself is in the cloud overhead waiting to see what we're going to do with his material. Because the scholarship has not done all that much.

How will it feed itself into the life stream of the church and have consequence in the last days of the profoundest kind that the church will take on a character and a conduct that would not have been theirs except God had given us through this man precious insight and treasure. And we're going to consider it

today. We need that presence.

We need the invisible cloud of witnesses. They're not just passive idle observers. They exert something.

I don't know what it is, but I know they're exerting something because they are not complete without us. We're called to finish what they have begun. And they have paid the price in sacrifice.

If you think scholarship is merely sitting down at a desk, you don't know what you want to know. It's a continual suffering. It's gut busting and brain busting to wade in and root out and look at the original language, the etymology of the word and its origin.

What did God mean when he said to Jeremiah, what do you see? I see an almond tree. What's the big deal? It's only a big deal when you know that in Hebrew, the word almond and the word chosen are exactly the same consonants except for one vowel. And that in the use of the Hebrew language, which this is the genius of Hebrew, that words have valences and meanings and a play on words that God often uses to the prophets and through the prophets.

And when God said, what did you see? And he says an almond in Hebrew, what he's seeing is something chosen. He's seeing a burden. He's seeing an oracle, but that's lost to us in English, but it's not lost to Gehad Van Raad.

Why? Because he broke his brains to learn Hebrew. That's what scholarship is, the original language. He wants to understand what was God saying in that, that the German translation does not yield, nor English.

And what have other scholars said about the same thing? What did Kyle and Dale say when they wrote their commentary on the book of Jeremiah or this one or that one? Well, then you have to read what that one said and ponder and wait. One of the most remarkable things is to read someone like Karl Barth, B-A-R-T-H, and see how he reviews what other scholars have said. And you realize this is no cheapy.

He's not just dismissing these guys with a wave of the hand. He has really invested them himself in what they have said. He's really seriously considered what they have said.

He doesn't necessarily approve it, but he will not reject it without first considering it deeply. And it's a lifetime of study. That's sacrifice.

And I've done all kinds of hard work in my life. Plumbing, pipe fitting, water, what do they call that? If there's a fire, sprinkler fitting, where the pipes were six inches in diameter and we had to cut the threads by hand or take them up and tighten and put them in place 65 feet off the ground on a moving, what do you call it, platform. And I'm a young Jewish squirt, an idealistic kid, an adventurer in San Francisco finding a job.

And the guys down below pushed the thing away. And I'm hanging 65 feet up in the air on the pipe by the wrench. And they're laughing below.

I mean, I've done hard work. I've dug ditches. I've been a seaman.

The hardest work I have ever done is to be a teacher. From that, I came home from school in the afternoons absolutely wasted. I went right to my bed.

I plopped down and I went out. I was unconscious. Body and soul, mind and spirit spent in wrestling with students over words.

So I appreciate scholarship and we need to appreciate it. It's not anti-spiritual, that if you're of the spirit, you don't need that. God has given us great inheritance, a heritage, and we want to receive that benefit.

So the prophet is the man of the word. It's fundamental, the basis of his existence and the object of their theological reflection. Their relationship to it was so personal and direct.

The word was so exclusively bound up with them at a specific time in the message which God gave them that they found it impossible to think of the word in some objective way. It had become specifically their own. They had taken it into themselves.

They internalized it. It was their own gut when they spoke it. And that's why the thing that distinguishes a prophet from a teacher is that he's required to live his word.

That's why Hosea had to marry a prostitute and that's why Isaiah had to lose his wife and not mourn publicly for her because that loss was a statement to the nation. Prophets invariably have to live their word, comes out of their experience. And so it's not some abstract thing.

It has been internalized and sifted through the grid of their own experience. And you can tell the difference when you hear a man speak, whether the word is just something clever that he has read, learned, or heard from another tape and is now speaking. It's true, but it's not a compelling truth.

It's true, but it's not an event. It bounces off rather than penetrates. We can hear another man say the same thing, and we're gasping.

We've been pierced through. What's the difference? For that man, the word has been sifted and refined and brought through the furnace of the earth of his own humanity seven times. It's been put through the fire and it comes out as a living word.

And the man is the word. And that's why prophets are killed because you cannot disassociate the word from the man. And if you want to reject the word, you have necessarily to put away the man.

So the prophetic word as the word of God is its ultimate expression. And I believe that the apostle subsumes all of the other fivefold ministries. He could do the work of an evangelist.

He's a teacher. He's pastoral and he's also prophetic. And when you read Paul, he's the supreme apostle.

You could know when he's speaking prophetically. So much of what Paul says is prophetic proclamation. He's speaking in that office subsumed in his apostolic calling.

So isn't it remarkable that a German scholar should see that and understand that? Would to God that Germany raised up not only scholars who understood it, but men who portrayed it, particularly in the Nazi time, or I would say even more before the Nazi time, during the 1800s and the 1900s, when German culture was effete, E-F-F-E-T-E, when German culture was man honoring and where Goethe, the great German poet, found the cross abrasive and said that it need to be garlanded with roses. It's too rough to take it in its biblical perspective that we need to soften it. Where then was the prophet of God to cry out against this stream of culture that was adversely affecting the Christian faith itself? Would to God that there were prophetic men in Germany, there would probably not have been a Hitler.

There would not have been a Nazism. They would have called the German reformed church to repentance for having moved away from Luther and from its own foundations and had become just a mere Sunday phenomenon. If you want to hear that cry, you'll need to hear the last message I spoke in Germany on this very recent trip at Nuremberg.

I sent that same tape to a German brother in Australia. I'll have to read you his email reply. He was astonished, stupefied.

He was aghast. He listened to it on his car radio. It's a wonder he didn't go into a ditch.

He said he was brought to depths of repentance himself for that word, because in that word, I was charging the German church with its failure, its historic failure, and that its repentance for the Jew, toward the Jew was false and sentimental and shallow, because it had not recognized what it itself needs to repent for, that the sin of Germany is the sin of Israel, one and the same, two religious bodies who have forfeited God and had kept the husk of their faith and lost its vitality and meaning, because it had become subservient to its culture and to its economy and to its way of life. It had become a Saturday and a Sunday addendum, rather than the foremost purpose for their being. And when these Germans heard that cry, the wife of the pastor said to me afterwards, from the moment that the first word came out of your mouth, it was like a sword.

And they came forward and proliferated their bodies all over the orphan and cried out before God in great depth of anguish of soul and repentance that broke forth later into singing in the spirit. And I said, this, now that what you're doing, you'll hear this on the tape, is more terrifying to the powers of darkness over Nuremberg and Germany than all of your charismatic worship to this time, because this song is born out of authentic repentance that came to you through the word that was sent. Got the picture? You can hear that tape and see if I'm exaggerating.

Well, would to God that they had heard words like that before the advent of Hitler in the 19th century, when they were promoting a syncretistic culture that was at harmony with philosophy and ethics and morality and poetry to diffuse and lose the apostolic character of the faith. Where was the prophet then who would cry out? There was one. Anybody got to guess what his name is? Karl Marx? No.

I'm talking about the 1800s. Nietzsche. You ever hear of him? You have an obligation to hear of him.

You have an obligation to understand history and to know what takes place in time, because it's the story of God. Well, this is a man who died in insane asylum. I'm not sure if he committed suicide, but I think he went insane.

He was very much like his Danish counterpart who cried out against the same bourgeois culture in Denmark, whose name was Kierkegaard. What's his first name? Sorin. Sorin.

S-O-R-I-N. You guys writing this down? Hey, Kierkegaard, K-I-E-R-G-E-G-A-A-R-D. You need to read him.

One of his books is called The Heresy of Heart. No. Yeah.

But I'm talking about the one, the word Christianity. It's argument against, attack on Christianity. What a title.

Attack on Christianity. He could not stand this middle-class bourgeois effete Christianity that was subservient to the prevailing culture and had lost its prophetic and apostolic character. You know where I had my wilderness experience? In Denmark, my wife's country.

After I was kicked out as the head of the New York branch of this Jewish Mission Society, the Lord sent us to Denmark, and there was my wilderness experience. Not because it was rough, but because it was effete, E-double-F-E-T-E. Because it was coffee at four o'clock, no matter if the world was coming to an end, with three different kinds of cake every time.

It's because of the creature life, the good life that the Danes celebrate over every other consideration. It was because even charismatic men were terrified of being baptized in water, where they looked upon an adult believer's baptism as the forfeiture of their infant sprinkling and were terrified even to consider it, let alone to do it. It was for me an anguish to live in such a nation for those months.

It was a wilderness. And so it was for Kierkegaard, who died in his 30s. It killed him.

So there were voices raised up, but they were not heard by their nation. And many of these same conditions prevail today that only a prophetic cry can answer. People need to hear God's view of it, or otherwise they think that what they're experiencing is normative.

Their life is dying by degrees. There's a daily death, and they don't know it. Their life is a death.

Their days are predictable, mundane, ordinary, insignificant, feeding their creature life. It has no eternal consequence or meaning. And they think that that's it.

They go to the entertainments of a ballgame to break the monotony or steep themselves under stupefaction before the TV set, and they're dying by the millions. And no one is raising their voice to cry out against the whole way of life that is full of death. So there's a great need for the prophetic voice and the prophetic word.

Okay. A critical account of the prophetic concept of the word is needed all the more urgently today in that we simply cannot assume that our conception of the word of God or of the function of words in general is identical with that held by the prophets. Oh, what a juicy statement.

We cannot assume that their concept is our concept, not only of the word of God, but of words itself, the phenomenon of word, the phenomenon of speaking, that they have the same attitude about it that we have. We need to go back and find out how they viewed it because very likely their prophetic and Hebraic sense of words and their meanings was far different than what we understand as modern Western people today. We see language only as a conveyance to give meaning or illustration or explanation, but they saw the word, not just the word of God, but words as having an inherent power in themselves, that the faculty of speech was the most significant gift of God of what was essential to his own deity given to men, that no other thing that he created has the capacity for speech than man.

They had an exalted view of speaking itself and of words that we have lost in our generation because our generation has become psychobabble. Our generation is blah. Ours is sound and fury signifying nothing.

Whose quotation is that? Shakespeare. Boy, did he ever hit the nail on the head. There's more blah, more profusion of words in our generation and our than ever in the history of mankind.

You want to see what I throw away every day in mail that comes to me. I throw it on the floor as I'm reading it from the bed. And when I have to get up later, the floor is littered with religious propoganda and four color appeals and societies and newspapers and into the garbage can.

I thought, my God, what a waste of all that paper, all that ink, all that human. And what is it? It's a beep. So it's a remarkable paradox that in all of this profusion of much worse, what are these TV program? These hosts, these talk shows, talk, talk, talk.

I don't think I've watched the program in the last 50 years, but when I visit my mother, whose TV set in Florida is on continually, it includes the late show or the talk shows. And I listened for a few minutes to the cheap, profane, vulgar and obscene, sexually loaded innuendos and so-called human. I want to gag and people will run and don't on these personalities with their blah.

If you don't think that word and speaking is being daily debased, you don't know. And to have speech debased and the faculty of speech denigrated is to rob men of their humanity. And that's why they're shooting each other in schools.

They're capable of the most atrocious acts. And this jerk can walk into the Jewish community center in Los Angeles and shoot five kids and an adult. And there's this picture in Time magazine as he's being taken by the authorities.

And he's got a smile on his face as if he's done God's service. There was a review in yesterday's Time magazine about Princess Diane. Some woman has made a psychological study and called her a nitwit that she had very, very little mental faculty.

And though she had the most pressing psychological and emotional problems of personality, she went to astrologists or took pressure baths or milk baths or I don't know, just a nitwit attitude toward life and yet one of the most celebrated personalities. There's a whole profusion of words, but there's a famine for the word of God in the land. People are perishing for the want of a true word.

One brother was saying, if you go back and look at the papers of the 1700s, as opposed to now, he said, you wouldn't believe that. Almost back then you would have to take out a dictionary to read the newspaper, as opposed to now. So we have to begin not just with an understanding of the word of God, but an understanding of words, period, per se.

And the heightened respect for the faculty of speech, which will be reflected in the way in which we ourselves exercise it. We ourselves will not give ourselves to blab. Our words will be fewer, but more worth hearing.

So the way in which speaking and words are understood today is different from the way it was understood by prophets. Today it's an aggregate of sounds to convey meaning. It's a phonetic entity which enables men to communicate with one another and is therefore a vehicle used for purposes of intellectual self-expression.

This function of the word, the conception of it as bearing and conveying an idea, is however far from covering the meaning which language had for ancient peoples, not only Israel, but other of the ancient peoples of the world. Pagans had a view of words very much in keeping with the way Hebrews looked upon the word. And that's why they could bestow curses and blessings.

And that if a man said something fearful, it was something that would be consequential. Because a word set something in motion. A word became an event.

And they had, even as pagans, a greater respect for what is spoken than we today. But in fact our view today may be completely opposite to the conception with which words were held in that earlier time. Because then a word was much more than something which indicates or designates a certain object.

Man's perception of the world about him was more unified. That there was not secular and sacred the way we see it today. And that the sacred thing takes place on Sunday and that the weekdays are something else.

The whole thing was sacred. There was not the disparity or the breaking up or the categorizing of things that we have as modern men. But they saw things whole.

The whole of life was charged with meaning. The secular thing was a sacred thing. And we see that as a carryover in primitive religions where they see in rocks and nature significant things.

I'm not saying that God is invested in those things. But there's something to be said for a mentality and a perception of reality that does not categorize and compartmentalize. And that we have acceded to that and allowed the world to define what reality is as sacred and secular.

That is a lie. For us, it is all sacred. That's the way God sees it.

And that's the way that God would have meant to see it. Because once they have made such a separation, then the secular thing becomes a cheap thing. And the sacred thing is no longer sacred.

It's just a Sunday phenomenon. So we're called to bring a world into seeing as God sees. And words are the instrument for that.

Between spiritual and material, the ideal and the real, word and object. The prophets believed that the Hebrew way of understanding words is that the word had to do with the object itself. The Hebrew word for word, Daba, D-A-B-A-R or D-A-V-A-R, means the same thing as word and as event.

The word Daba means event, but it also means word. Because they saw the word as an event. The word was a happening.

To say it and to name it was to cause it. And it's not coincidental that the first function that God gives to Adam is to name the animals. That when he named them, so to speak, not that he created them, he gave them its authentic identity and meaning.

The word that he chose to employ was not just a label, it was an event. It was involved, so to speak, in the bringing forth of what God had created into its actuality. Can you picture that? Our words are charged.

Well, we know that with the mouth is the power to bless but to curse. And fools in the book of Proverbs are those who speak words mindlessly. Even today, in Proverbs 18, in the tongue is the power to bless but to curse.

And that's the Hebraic view, but it's not the modern view. And though modern man does not see it that way, that's the way it in fact is. And his words will either injure, cripple, kill, or bless.

And what goes on behind closed doors and drawn shades, only God knows. And what men speak, rail, shout, yell, curse, or listen to. And when their kids freak out, they wonder how come.

Because something has gone into the spirit, the human spirit of these kids from the volume of things that they have heard. When you think about all that rap music and all that kind of thing, it just totally devastates. When you just barely listen, I hate that, just a beat of it.

And we could say something about silence. You can't speak about speaking and not speak about silence. That there's something to be said for silence.

That unless there's a respect, if not a reverence for silence and for quiet, speaking will then necessarily be debased. That we'll appreciate sound because we appreciate quiet. And there's not enough of that appreciation.

This is a whole generation that has always something glued to its ears. It's wearing its sound thing as it carries the thing, as it jogs, as they do their homework. This generation can't stand silence.

But silence is precious. And maybe it's foundational to understanding the value of words because it comes out of a respect first for quiet. So Van Raad says it was only when men gave the animals their names that they existed for him and were available to his use.

The word that he gave and the name that he gave established the identity of the reality of that thing. That's the way the Hebrews saw it. It brings those things into being when it is recited.

Maybe that's why the early church recited the Apostles' Creed. Because when you recite it, it's not just a mindless articulation. You're bringing again the reality of those words into your spirit as faith.

So this is a conception of the word which was more dynamic, where a word stood for something, affected something, created something. How much more when it's the word of God if that's the nature of mere words themselves? He says, one can well ask whether language has not become impoverished because it has lost functions which at an earlier cultural level had once belonged to it. Isn't that a beautiful statement? Has language become impoverished? Has it become a blah because we have lost the sense of what words mean and what they convey? Truly.

And if words and language have become impoverished, what about those who bear them, who are affected by them? The whole of life is impoverished. Mankind is impoverished even to the point of losing its divine identity and reflecting the image of him who made it. Satan is busy in defacing man and destroying the image of God in man and making man a blob.

And the surest way is to attack the issue of speech itself and to debase it and to impoverish it. And that's why our kids are hardly capable, I'm speaking very generally, of more than grunts. You'll ask them a question, how did you feel? They don't know how to frame a thought.

They're impoverished. They don't know how to assess, to evaluate, to reflect. A brother here brought up a precious insight on the word amusement.

We are an amused generation. The amusement industry is on the stock market. Disney Studios is one of the leading parameters of the health of the economy and what its status is in terms of its rise and fall in percentage points.

Because it's got Disneyland and it's got movie producing faculties and the entertainment thing is an industry, maybe the most massive industry. And \$19 billion a year is spent by teenagers and kids on amusement. Toys, films, video, their electronic gimmicks, it's all to be amused.

So a brother once shared with us a very precious insight. When you look at the etymology and the root meaning of the word amused, as we ought to look, the prefix a- before any word negates the word. Atheist is denying Theo, God.

An atheist is one who denies God. What is amusement? It denies and negates musing. What does muse mean? M-U-S-E.

To reflect, to ponder, to consider, to weigh up, to analyze, to critique, to examine. And I would say that those functions are the very genius of what it means to be human. That one who cannot assess, evaluate, critique, and examine has forfeited his humanity.

He's just a metabolism. He's something that will consume so many meals and wear out so many clothes and occupy so much space, but his life is without any telling value. And if we prophetic men need to stand for anything, we need to stand for what God has created in his own image.

Man is the statement of God. And if that is debased and made animalistic and cheap and a mere physical kind of thing that gorges itself and has nothing but to be amused and to sit before TV sets and burp, it's a disgrace to God. It's a dishonoring of his name and of the model of creation itself.

We need to stand for that reality. That's why I had to write a letter to the editor about Star Wars, that this commercialization, that Pepsi-Cola Corporation paid George Lucas \$2.5 billion for the exclusive rights to use the Star Wars themes and entities for the promotion of its products so that you can collect its Pepsi-Cola cans because every can has another figure. And so there's a continuation of this product materialistic thing that's tied in with the entertainment until you're satiated, until you're wallowing, until you're drowned in it and debased in it.

You become to look like and to be the same as these demonic figures. You have become demonized and it's part of mass saturation and the process of merchandise that they will make as much if not more from the spin-off products of little dolls and Pepsi-Cola than they made from the film itself, though the film itself is a multi-million dollar epic. They'll get back their investment.

One of the most expensive films ever made in the first weeks in which it is shown around the world. Power of mammon and of money and of profit and of greed debasing what is made in God's image, ruining an entire generation of youth and preparing them to be the cruel masters who will persecute the church in the last days without pity and without compassion for they are without natural affection. How do they become that where they can murder and spill blood because by the time that they're 15 they have seen 40,000 murders on TV and rape and pillage and looting and the so-called news is itself atrocious.

And while we're silent and our voice is not heard in crying out prophetically against this attack on God's image. So there's a, Gerhard von Rath says, there's a mysterious power of creation in words itself. Language can produce something new or an intensified form of something already in existence.

That is to say language itself became creative and this is a possibility which language has never lost even to this day. That's it. I wish you'd been here for morning prayer time where we read through a psalm and the psalmist co-joined two words, refuge and saving.

He said, you're a saving refuge. It's like touching two wires and the electric, the bringing together of two words in a creative juxtaposition transformed both words spoken separately. It was the bringing together of them in a new form and pattern that opened up a creative possibility and makes you gasp.

See what I mean? That possibility is with us always. Words have that creative possibility but I doubt very much if we're going to see it unless there are men who believe it and desire it and will express it. So we know about the power of blessing and curse and if there's anything that distinguishes Jeremiah and the prophets was to bring to the attention of an apostate generation that the covenant of which you are heir has at his heart and pivot this prospect that for Israel there's no middle route.

There's no getting by and that's the mentality of the modern world today. As the students used to come up to my desk at the beginning of school years, Mr. Katz, what do I need to do to get by? There's no getting by for Israel. It's either blessing or curse.

Radical alternative and it's in the code. It's in Deuteronomy. It's in the word of God.

It's in the promise of the covenant. If you'll walk in my way and walk in my ordinances in a way pleasing before me and do all that I speak to you this day, you will be blessed. Your enemies will be routed.

The fear of you will go before you. One will overcome a thousand, but if you turn from my way, if you reject my word, if you despise my Sabbaths, this is what will befall you. You'll be cast out of the land.

The sword will pursue you. At night you will wish it were day. At day you will wish it were night.

Blessing or curse through the word and so the prophet who has steeped himself in the word of God and in Deuteronomy and the law of God, which word is timeless, is now required to bring that consciousness to a generation to which it's entirely lost and is standing at the very threshold of experiencing that curse. Talk about a weight of responsibility. Von Raad being the scholar that he is, who knows not only Hebrew as an original language, knew also Greek as well as Latin.

That was once called classical education and I've got two advanced degrees and I don't know a word of Latin or Greek and what I know of Hebrew you can give to any kid who has had any exposure to Hebrew school because we moved away from classical education. It's too hard. Do you know that in Europe kids go to school five and a half days a week? Do you know that Japanese students have a third more hours of instruction than American kids? And that's, having been a teacher, I know how much of those hours are waste and sound and furious against it and find nothing and doing little exercises or projects and stuff like that.

The classical education centered in languages, but the center in languages, the center in the culture of those languages is to understand the mindset. What is the Greek mentality? How do they view life? What is their understanding about time? How do they understand history? What did they value? How is it that the Greeks gave us the philosophers, Socrates and Plato and Aristotle were Greek and a classic education was to read their works in their language. No wonder that we have men like the scholar in England who wrote a whole series of books, the tales, something.

C.S. Lewis, scholar, classical scholar. But when he came to the faith and brought that whole background into his examination of scripture, what a wealth for those of us. And his mind and skill and articulation brought even a depth of understanding about the scripture itself.

His mind had been shaped and formed and schooled in languages and the cultures of ancient civilization. So here's a little note that Gehart von Raad brings about Greek understanding of language, that it not only conveyed meaning, but it brought a certain music, that Greek has a lyrical and musical quality that even Hebrew does not have. And that the Greeks so celebrated that, that their dramas and plays and poems and recitations were not only enjoyed for the content and the meaning, but for the sound of it.

It was both an aesthetic as well as an intellectual experience. It was like a full meal. Well, once in a while when I get carried away, I think, what would a real sermon be? A prophetic word of God that not only bore great meaning, but had a symphonic quality to it.

Like when you listen to Beethoven and his fifth symphony, that theme walks all the way through this entire symphony and comes to a great epic of conclusion that's majestic. And when it's over here, it's an experience. How would the word of God be if it had symphonic proportions? It began with and then it would rise in crescendo and come to a great and awesome climax that you've not only heard a meaning, but something has been conveyed with it that comes in the totality of yourself in all your humanity, you have experienced a word as well as heard it.

That's preaching. The prophets were called preachers and preaching itself is a lost art. And it's more than homiletics on how to do it.

It's how to convey the word that will become an experience for the hearer, an event of a life-changing and transfiguring kind. And I'll tell you that if we had a church like that, hearing from preachers like that, you would not only be the church that would be transfigured, but society itself. Something of that has got to spill over into the world.

So may the Lord heighten and renew our respect for words and their use, their creative possibility, even their melody and their rhythm as well as their content. And I can't believe that the instrument through which those things pass will himself be unaffected. That is if he's himself just a vehicle for the transmission and he himself is not affected by what passes through him.

He has got to be affected. He's changed even as he's communicating to others. That word itself has a salutary effect on his own spirit, his own understanding.

Often he's instructing himself out of his own mouth. He's not only speaking to his hearers, he's speaking to himself. Because as I've often said, I can't wait to sound this, to speak this, because I want to hear what I'm saying.

I want to hear what God is saying. That's how I waited for this class to begin. I had never spoken this before about the freedom of a prophet or the word of God in this way.

And I'm wanting to hear it. I need to hear it for myself, but I will not hear it until it's spoken for you. It's an experience for me as it is for you.

I'm transformed and affected myself in the speaking as you are in the hearing. And that's the way it ought to be. And that's how the church will move from faith to faith and glory to glory.

It's transformed by its own word, both in the speaking and in the hearing. And if transformation will not come through, that means it will not come at all, because it is the sole, exclusive instrumentality of God will not employ another, for he himself is the word. See what we're doing even now? I'm glancing down at

things that I've marked, picking up a word or phrase and then letting the Lord round it out.

So there's a creative process taking place right now, even in sharing this, that is exclusive to the word. What a privilege to be involved in a creative process. I hope you'll understand me rightly when I say, like unto God, that he brooded over the chaos, his spirit moved and he spoke and he created.

And that we are also invited in some measure to the same privilege. And it's happening right now over this table. It happened this morning in our devotional time.

It may happen tonight. The possibility is always before us. We should have the faith to anticipate it and expect it, because faith is expectation and will actually draw it out of God's heart.

We're called to be co-creators. Isn't that remarkable? Through the faculty of speech. The words of a verse in Greek, it can be said of it that it's also a music as well as a meaning.

And that this is equally true of many of the utterances of the Old Testament prophets. They were poets. We think that a poet is some kind of pansy.

We might even question whether he is fully a man. I could tell you that the Psalmists and the prophets, as we said, were manly men, but they were also poets. What's the genius of poetry? What's the difference between poetry and prose? It has a rhythm.

Poetry has a rhythm? Definitely. It is a kind of music. It's a lyrical thing.

It's a delight to read. Even the sound of it falls on the ear. How else is it different? What is prose? We call people prosaic.

To be prosaic is to be ordinary. Prose is the ordinary use of words for mere communication. To expound an idea or to describe something or to instruct.

I'm not knocking that. We need that. But what is the distinction of poetry that the Psalms are poetic? What we read this morning was poetic.

Certain rhythm, a certain play on words, a certain repetition of words, a certain contrast between the wicked men and the works of their hands who despise the work of God's own hand. It's a play on the word hands and work. It's poetic.

After all, it's only one and a half pages long. It's only several verses, but in that is compressed a meaning that if it were expounded in prose would take several pages. So poetry is a more intensive form of communication than prose.

It's one thing to write a novel or a book, but try writing a poem. How many drafts must you make for the rhythm, for the assonance, for the sound, the quality of sound, for the rhyme, for the penetration? I'm trying to think of some poems. I like William Wordsworth, the English poet, who greatly offended by the commercialization of his own age in England and the Industrial Revolution and how it was destroying the souls of men, wrote a poem in which he said, in getting and spending we make waste our powers.

Little we find in nature that is ours. We've lost even the capacity to benefit from God's creation. We've lost the faculty and the power because of the commercialization of the age.

He says, standing on this lee, looking out at the sea, he describes himself as standing on a kind of a cliff looking out at the ocean. He said that Triton would rise, the ancient mythical god of the sea, with his trident. I'd much rather have a faith of a pagan than be forlorn and wasted as a modern person who has lost everything and whose Christianity is pablum because it has become victim to the age.

I'd rather be a pagan with a faith in something rising out of the sea than I should come to a destitute condition, impoverished, where I'm incapable of even benefiting from nature. In another poem he speaks of himself as a lad. He grew up in the lake country.

I've never been there in England. He said, when then I was a lad. Instead of saying, when I was a young man, he said, when then I was a lad.

He's saying the same thing, but he's saying it in an unusual word form. Where do we get an image of a young man walking through the flowers and the grass and the nature and the trees? When then a lad I was, I forgot, something like that. That's poetry.

Poetry is a more intensive form of communication and a more penetrating way of piercing the consciousness of the hearer than the ordinary conveyance of words. Prophets and psalmists were poets. Isaiah is a poet.

When you read him, remarkable what is compressed and condensed in one chapter. Chapter 35 of Isaiah, nature itself. He talks about hills skipping like lambs and trees clapping their hands.

These are poetic figures. He says more in one chapter in Isaiah 35 about Israel's exile and movement through the wilderness of the nations. That would have taken chapters and prose to describe.

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad. He's ascribing to inanimate nature the ability to observe and have an understanding and even to have an emotion. Where does he take that liberty? He's wanting to make a point.

And so he invests nature with qualities that it probably does not have. But it says something. Right away your attention is grabbed.

What? Nature is observing something and is glad about something? What must that something be? The desert shall rejoice and blossom at this something. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with singing, with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. What in fact shall they see? They're going to see Jews in their bedraggled condition, having been cast out of their nation and their places of security in the world, being forced apart, so to speak, through the wilderness of the nations. It's a despairing sight and yet nature is rejoicing over it and abounding and for having them pass through itself because when they see that they know that the end is near.

That this last trial of Israel, however grim it now is, will end with blessing and rejoicing as God restores this nation and the remnant of it through the very trial and establishes his coming in his kingdom. And that the nation, that creation that is under a curse, Paul speaks about that, that is groaning and travailing till now will rejoice for the sons of God that are coming into fulfillment. You can look at that at your own leisure.

He's writing prophetically and poetically to convey remarkable meaning in few words. So if we're not all poets, we all ought to bear some resonance of this in our speaking. If nature will respond to words and sound, what of men? Well, let's have a little break, a little prayer, and come back for, have a little word, conclude.

One of the things I want to do today, perhaps tonight, is to read prophecy in this edition of the most significant journal on the prophetic phenomenon published in England, Prophecy Today, in which they actually publish a prophetic statement that says, Thus saith the Lord, and what I'm going to ask you is, do you witness the Lord in that statement? Here's a prophetic magazine printing, so to speak in italics, a statement that they believe that they have received prophetically, and you'll not find anything in that statement to contest. It's full of truth, it's descriptive of the condition of the world and what it speaks of, everything in it is true. My question is, the fact that it's true, is it the word of God? Can we put the appellation and the title, Thus saith the Lord, to a statement that did not come to us from God, but that we imagined it did, or that it's just something in our own thought and spirit that happens to be true, and call that a Thus saith the Lord? And if we do, what are we doing to the word of God? What are we affecting, even though the content may be true, if it's not actually God's own word, however true it is, what are we doing in the name of prophecy against the prophetic word? Do you understand what I'm saying? And I'm not saying that it's not the word of God, I'm going to ask you if you witness it.

Do you see how subtle this is? The content is unquestionably true, but does that make it God's own word? The fact that something is true, and that we can state it, can we call that the word of the Lord? Or is there really something beyond that, that is so sacred, that can only come out of the counsel of God? Maybe after the break we'll come in Jeremiah himself, where Jeremiah speaks about the false prophets and God's condemnation of them, because they have not spoken his word, because they ran when they were not sent, and because they expressed as a Thus saith the Lord that which they had never been given. If that is not a description of the prophetic phenomenon today that is being so celebrated, I don't know what is. So how jealous we need to be for that word that has its origin in God.

That's not to say that truthful things should not be spoken, but let's not label them as a Thus saith the Lord if the Lord himself has not said that. So Lord, grow us up in these things, sharpen our discernment, my God, as men who are not amused, but as men who muse, who reflect, who weigh up, who consider, who are critical in the best sense of the word, who evaluate, who can tell the difference between a word that is true and a word that is from God, because we're called, my God, to convey those things. So thank you for today, Lord, and enlarge our cup to receive all that you're saying.

It will not return to you void, because if it's sent, it will accomplish that purpose for which it is sent, and we bless you in that. Thank you for this day, Lord. Honor our fasting.

No big deal, but we're willing to put aside the gratification of natural food, making more room for you, Lord, and we pray that you'll honor and bless it and give us from your table something more precious for that reason. Give us a little breather now and bring us back with renewed ability, my God, to hear your continuation and conclusion of these matters. We thank and give you praise for the privilege.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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