

True and False Prophets

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between true and false prophets, and the need for brokenness and separation from the world in order to hear and proclaim God's Word accurately.

Scripture: Jeremiah 23:16-18, Jeremiah 23:25-27, Ezekiel 13:3-6, Ephesians 2:19-20

Topics: "Discernment", "True Prophecy"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the critical distinction between true and false prophets, expressing concern over the current trend of self-proclaimed prophetic voices that dilute the true meaning of the prophetic office. He draws parallels to the prophet Jeremiah, who faced opposition from false prophets while delivering God's urgent warnings. Katz warns that listening to false prophets can lead to spiritual complacency and a misunderstanding of God's nature. He stresses the necessity of seeking God genuinely, rather than for personal gain, to receive authentic prophetic insight. Ultimately, he calls for a return to the sacredness of God's Word and the prophetic calling in a time of great need.

Transcript

I trust that you share with me the increasing sense of importance that this subject bears. Up until now, I have borne with some patience and even amusement the number of those who currently label themselves "prophetic" and the popularity that this calling now enjoys, which has been contrary to my own experience. It seemed another one of those "fads" that sooner or later would fade away. Now though, it is hitting too close to home in the things jealously dear to my own heart that have to do with the maintaining of the dignity and meaning of the word "prophet" itself!

After all, if we cheapen or lose the true office of prophet, what foundation have we, seeing that "the household of God...[is itself] built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:19-20). My own now bold proclamation in every place of an impending time of calamity for the state of Israel and Jews everywhere, as being a statement issuing authoritatively from an office rather than an opinion, demands a repudiation or a recognition of the seriousness of that office and those who profess to speak from it.

For I believe that it is to those in the true office of prophet that the incisive interpretation of prophetic scripture is given. The question then of true or false has now become either the unnecessary disturbing of the church for that which is already past or a life-or-death warning of that which is not only future but imminent. How remarkably this parallels the experience of an earlier "prophet of doom," Jeremiah, who

had not only to contend with the recalcitrance of the nation to heed his warning but the active opposition of those claiming also to be prophets!

The cry of God through him against the false prophets in the classic diatribe of chapter 23 must have been an additional anguish for his already vexed soul. In a "thus saith the Lord of hosts," not employed as the device to sanctify what is only a human conjecture, but as one that punctuates the urgency of God's own heart, the people are warned "not to listen to the words of the prophets that prophesy to you; they are deluding you. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord" (v.16).

For even to listen is to be dulled and made more conducive to the soothing and seductive "It shall be well with you...no calamity shall come upon you" (v.17). Such men prophesy "the deceit of their own hearts...saying I have dreamed a dream...by their dreams which they tell one another...they make my people forget my Name" (vv.25-27). That is, in the lightness of their banter to which the name of the Lord is recklessly affixed, God is necessarily demeaned and diminished as God; for what God is in the totality of his Nature and character is implied and is intrinsic in His Name!

From whence this unspeakable audacity of those who though they were not sent, "yet they ran" (v.21)! "Senseless prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing", who have "envisioned falsehood and lying divination" and even in the depths of their own self-deception, "yet [even] wait for the fulfillment of their word" (Ezekiel 13:3-6) [of a peace that cannot and will not come] "saying to those who despise the Word of the Lord, it shall be well with you...no calamity shall come upon you" (Jeremiah 23:17)!

"For who has stood in the council of the Lord so as to see and hear His Word? Who has given heed to His Word so as to proclaim it?" (v.18). The very word "who" in the cry of this verse indicates not many, for the "council" of God implies the most intimate sense of God from which men of presumption and ambition are necessarily barred! God grounds the sanctity of His Name and His Word in the confines of relationship from which busy men have neither the time nor disposition to enter.

Neither is it a place where one can come with the express purpose of finding a word. For to come for the expediency of the word alone is to come in the spirit of utility, which is to say, not to come in the name of the Lord! God must be sought, consistently, for His own sake and not for that which can be obtained from Him, even for "ministry"! How shall men who have already profaned the sacred by invoking the name of the Lord as a catchword [to give an aura of credibility to their own conjectures] so much as even have the disposition for such a seeking?

They are false in themselves and reflect an age that is false in itself in which many in the church have been infected and cannot tell the difference! As always in the last analysis of any issue, it is the Cross which is at stake! For to be "in the council of the Lord" requires that brokenness, that disposition to wait, that separation from the itch for fame and recognition, that willingness for the bearing of rejection, of misunderstanding, of necessary offense, that utterness toward God, that sending from a body willing to share in these sufferings the burden of the unique prophetic anguish, the daily dying which is necessarily the history and condition of any man called to the holy task of prophet in this final generation.

Has ever our age stood in greater need of hearing the heart of God? O for the Word of the Lord when He chooses to give it. When it comes, I suspect, it will be to those are in the practice of a daily and early communing, who do not make the issue of obtaining anything a condition for their devotion, who find His silences as holy as His speakings, paying homage to Him as God because He is God, and will therefore not withhold His Word when it comes, however painful its implications and its judgments, knowing that

even the judgments of God are themselves a mercy!

To them, like the ancient Hebrew prophets cited above, will the honor and privilege also be given to proclaim to Israel their restoration, and to the Church, His soon Coming, His Kingdom and His glory.

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