

Three Lessons From Lakeland

by David Servant

The Lakeland revival teaches us to judge ministers by their fruits, not by their miracles or supernatural manifestations, and to prioritize humility in ministry.

Scripture: Matthew 7:20, Matthew 20:26, Matthew 23:12, Mark 16:18, 1 Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 5:5, Revelation 21:8

Topics: "False Prophets", "Christian Discernment"

Description

David Servant addresses the controversial revival meetings in Lakeland, Florida, led by Todd Bentley, emphasizing the importance of discerning true prophets by their fruits and teachings, rather than being misled by false signs and wonders. He highlights the downfall of Bentley, revealing the dangers of exalting oneself and the consequences of immorality and deception in ministry. Servant urges believers to focus on holiness, obedience to God's commandments, and humility, warning against following self-proclaimed apostles and prophets who prioritize personal gain over biblical truth.

Transcript

Depending on where you live in the world and what interests you, you may or may not have some knowledge of the recent revival meetings in Lakeland, Florida, led by Canadian Todd Bentley. Although tens of thousands from around the world flocked to Lakeland over a period of four months---mostly due to the reports of physical healings---the meetings generated considerable controversy due to Bentley's questionable doctrines, strange angelic encounters, unconventional style, and his exaggerated and sometimes outright false reports of miracles.

Perhaps the crowning moment of the Lakeland meetings was June 23rd, when a number of prominent charismatic "apostles" and "prophets" publicly endorsed Bentley's ministry and the revival he was leading. Charisma magazine, in an article titled, Leaders Commission Todd Bentley at "Lakeland Outpouring," stated that, "The special service was billed by leaders as one of the greatest moments in revival history." One well-known charismatic leader, an "apostle," described that event as "a commissioning ceremony, complete with decrees and prophecies of going to higher levels, predictions of Todd's increasing world-wide influence and leading a world-wide revival, emphatic and prolific endorsements of his character, etc." Peter Wagner, "presiding apostle" of the International Coalition of Apostles, was one of those who endorsed Bentley that evening, publicly stating, "This commissioning represents a powerful spiritual transaction taking place in the invisible world. With this in mind, I take the apostolic authority that

God has given me and I decree to Todd Bentley, your power will increase, your authority will increase, your favor will increase, your influence will increase, your revelation will increase."

Just a few weeks later, however, it became apparent that all those "apostles" and "prophets" may have made a little mistake. The Lakeland revival, already in decline by then, unraveled with Bentley's announcement of his plans to divorce his wife and the revelation of his inappropriate relationship with a woman on his ministry staff. Since then, it has been learned that those revelations are just the tip of the iceberg.

One lesson we can all learn from Lakeland is that you can toss out the gospel found in the Bible, kick and punch people who are seeking healing, regularly chat with angels with names like "Winds of Change" and "Emma," act like a drunken fool, transfer your anointing so that others can spread these blessings around the globe, repeatedly exaggerate and lie, gain riches in the process, and be a successful minister in the U.S. But whatever you do, don't divorce your wife. That could ruin you (at least temporarily).

Pushing all sarcasm aside, I think there are some very valid lessons that can be learned from Lakeland. I'm going to do my best to be as gracious as I can, which at my current level of sanctification will not be gracious enough for some. If you think I'm too critical, my only defense is this: If you knew how critical I was tempted to be, you would be proud of my self-restraint.

Lesson #1

The first and most important lesson is, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:20). Jesus told His followers this to keep them from being misled by false prophets and teachers. Read within its immediate context, it is very clear that the kind of fruit Jesus was speaking of was not the fruit of miracles or supernatural manifestations:

So then, you will know them [false prophets] by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:20-23).

This being so, Jesus must have been speaking of the fruit of holiness. Since Jesus' warning was spoken within the context of His Sermon on the Mount, we are certainly warranted to judge every minister's life by the standards found there. If Christians would do that, they would quickly realize that there are thousands of false prophets and teachers today who have infiltrated the church. I do not exaggerate. Long before the revelations that ended his revival, those who applied the Matthew 5 through 7 test on Todd Bentley were not deceived by him.

Additionally, if someone claims to be a minister of Christ, then what he teaches---the fruit of his lips---should also be scrutinized in the light of Scripture. Those who tested Todd Bentley's teachings with Scripture were not misled by him.

Many who were troubled by certain things they heard and witnessed at the Lakeland meetings convinced themselves to overlook them, assuming that the healings were proof of God's blessing and approbation. But Jesus solemnly warned that there will be people who will prophesy, cast out demons and work miracles---all in His name---who will hear Him say, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice

lawlessness." Does this have any application to Todd Bentley? Blushing Peter Wagner (who led the June 23rd endorsement of Bentley) recently wrote to his constituency:

Todd Bentley now carries the label of a liar and a deceiver....Todd has been removed from public ministry until further notice...It has become clear that he indulged in periodic drunkenness. He has no intention at the moment of reconciling with Shonna [his wife], nor does she with him. Their marriage has been torn for years by his emotional attachment with at least one other female whose physical contact went beyond hugging and kissing and holding hands. Enough said---maybe more details will be revealed later---but it was clearly immoral. All of this was skillfully concealed by lying and by swearing close associates who had observed his behavior to secrecy.

According to the Bible that every Christian owns, no drunkard or immoral person will inherit eternal life, and all liars will find themselves in the Lake of Fire (see 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:8). Unless Todd Bentley repents and is truly born again, he will be condemned at his judgment. But for now, he has been exposed to everyone as a wolf in sheep's clothing. Sadly, he will be considered by many to be an anointed prophet with some personal issues who needs counseling before he is restored once again to his anointed ministry, in spite of what the Bible clearly teaches. This is tragic, and is only one more symptom of a much greater problem.

In any case, don't be misled by miracles. The antichrist will perform miracles, and that is one reason the whole world will go after him. Look for holiness and obedience to Jesus' commandments.

Lesson #2

A second lesson we can learn from Lakeland relates to the first. Since we should not judge the validity of a minister or a meeting by miracles and supernatural manifestations, can we thus conclude that every healing is of satanic origin that occurs under the ministry of a someone whose fruit betrays him as being a false prophet? As strange as it seems, the answer is "no." Here's the reason why: God honors His word, and if He makes conditional promises, He will keep His promises to anyone who meets His conditions, regardless of anything else.

For example, it is theoretically possible that a man could be genuinely born again in a porn shop if he happened to read a gospel tract that was placed there. But because he was born again in a porn shop, does that mean that God approves of everything (or anything, for that matter) that goes on there? Obviously not.

By the same token, no one can deny that Jesus often told people whom He healed that their faith healed them. And He made quite a few amazing promises that can certainly be applied by those needing healing today. That being so, here is another question: If a person gains faith to be healed in a meeting directed by a false prophet, will God deny that person his healing for that reason? Certainly not.

Clearly, one of the main emphases of the Lakeland meetings was divine healing. Many came for that reason (and many left the meetings very disappointed). Sadly, Bentley used lies and exaggerated reports to build the faith of those who came seeking healing. Nevertheless, some apparently had their faith encouraged and God healed them in response to their faith. But those healing miracles were in no way a sign from God that He was endorsing the messenger or anything else that occurred at the Lakeland meetings. He was only honoring His promises---and nothing more.

One important addendum can be added to this second lesson.

If you are a truly God-called evangelist, it should bring you great joy to know that if God will honor His Word spoken through a false prophet, then He will certainly honor it if spoken through a true prophet! How tragic it is that, while false prophets sometimes use God's Word to birth miracle-producing faith in people whom they then exploit, many of God's true prophets keep quiet about divine healing. Perhaps they do so in order not to be associated with the Todd Bentleys of the world today. I'm happy to report, however, that there are thousands and thousands of genuine God-called evangelists around the world who incorporate some degree of biblical and divine healing in their ministries. They know what a valuable tool it is in helping them reach the lost with the gospel. Divine healing draws people to listen to the gospel.

That being so, if you are a genuine God-called evangelist---who proclaims a biblical gospel that calls people to repentance and a living faith---you have biblical reason to expect that divine healing should be a part of your ministry. If you don't believe me, read the book of Acts. An evangelist without the component of divine healing in his ministry is like a carpenter without a hammer. He's missing a tool that could make him much more successful.

Actually, divine healing is not something that is just limited to the ministries of genuine evangelists. Jesus told us that one sign that will follow those who believe in Him is that they will "lay hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 16:18). When I was in Nepal earlier this year, I heard from several reliable sources that the amazing growth of Christianity in that Hindu nation has been due in large part to believers healing the sick. It has become common belief in Nepal that, if you, or even one of your animals is sick, the thing to do is call for a Christian to come and pray. God has honored His promise to those who have taken Him at His Word. So let's all give ourselves a self-administered kick in the rear in this regard and start laying hands on the sick and asking God to heal them. Let's not shrink back from this only because of a few Todd Bentleys.

Lesson #3

The third and final lesson is this: "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." This is a promise from God (see Matt. 23:12)

It was obviously not God who exalted Todd Bentley, because God doesn't exalt to leadership positions within the body of Christ immoral, drunken deceivers who exalt their imaginations above His Word. It was Todd Bentley who exalted himself by various means of deception and with the help of others whom he deceived. But God is faithful to His promises. He has certainly humbled Bentley before those who adored him, deplored him, or ignored him. We pray that his humiliation leads to his repentance.

But Todd Bentley was not the only self-exalted minister whom God has recently humbled. Everyone who stood on the platform on June 23rd to commission Todd Bentley is included in that list, and especially those who claimed to speak for God as they prophesied of the ever-increasing glories of the Lakeland "revival" and Bentley's ministry. Some are now trying to save face as they back-peddle before their contributing constituents, but they are only losing their credibility to an even greater degree.

What is the motive of those whom God has not called to be apostles or prophets yet who claim to be apostles and prophets? It can only be pride and self-exaltation. For this reason, thousands of ministers in North America and elsewhere are seeking titles and joining organizations like the International Coalition of Apostles (where membership dues are \$650 per year). They want recognition, and so they play a more

subtle version of the child's game King of the Hill. It wasn't too long ago that these self-promoters were vying only for the title of "bishop."

While the Bible makes it clear that apostles are God-called and God-sent persons who make disciples and plant churches by the power of the Holy Spirit, so many of modern "apostles" have never planted a single church. But they want to have authority over churches in order to gain wealth and notoriety, and calling yourself an apostle seems to be the first step in finding gullible pastors who will become a part of your "down-line." May God have mercy.

Gentlemen, if any of you are reading this, the way to avoid further humiliation and ultimate humiliation when you stand before Christ is to humble yourself, remembering that "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 20:26). God has sent all of you a merciful warning by means of the recent public humiliation of Todd Bentley and the self-anointed "apostles" and "prophets" who publicly endorsed him. You can back-peddle all you want; the fact remains that you publicly endorsed as a man of God a wolf in sheep's clothing. There were many more who are guilty of this besides just those of you who stood on the platform with Todd Bentley on June 23rd. Those who exalt themselves God will humble. In fact, as so many of you have exchanged His truth for lies---hoping to gain notoriety among your peers by your "new revelations"---God has already been publicly humiliating you before multitudes of people.

"How so," you ask? God is allowing many of you to become deceived to a degree that is almost unimaginable to the saints (and the world). What so many of you believe and teach is so far from being biblical that it can only be classed as deluded mysticism: Gold dust and "Holy Spirit feathers" falling upon your followers. Gold fillings appearing in their teeth. "Third heaven visualizations." Drunken jerking. "Spiritual Mapping." "Heavenly portals," "star gates" and "open heavens." "Trance dancing." "Holy Ghost parties." Pyramid prosperity schemes. The "presence movement."

Your bizarre doctrines and practices make you appear to be absolute dunderheads, and you don't even realize it. We are embarrassed for you! Is it possible that, as God humbled proud Nebuchadnezzar by giving him the mind of a beast, you are under a similar judgment? While you bask in the awe of your thousands of gullible admirers, millions sadly shake their heads at you. And it appears that you have become deluded beyond any hope of return. You have made a mockery of God's Word with your myths and now He is making a mockery of you before the world. You have become so supernaturally imbecilic that you are completely blind to it. You have become a terrifying object lesson to any who would exalt themselves and dare to discard God's Word in favor of their own imaginations.

I will leave my readers with just one small sample of what I'm speaking. Below is an advertisement found in a recent email newsletter of one of the three primary leaders of the 500 "apostles" who currently are members of the International Coalition of Apostles, a "prophet" and "apostle" named Chuck Pierce. Along with Peter Wagner, he believes that (and I quote) "the Second Apostolic Age began roughly in 2001, heralding the most radical change in the way of doing church at least since the Protestant Reformation" (from the ICA website).

Here is that ad:

RESOURCES TO HELP IGNITE YOU IN A NEW WAY

Be Revived Anointing Oil and Candle Set

Revival is in earth's atmosphere! Because the anointing breaks the yoke, we have sought the Lord on the ingredients needed for a revival fire anointing oil and candle. The first aspect of Revived is "awakening". We use costmary, an herb used by the colonists to stay alert and awake. The second ingredient we incorporate is pomegranate, representing healing, overcoming and prosperity. The third ingredient is "harvest". This is a mixture of the seven species of Israel which represent the fullness of unlocking the harvest fields. There is a boldness that God is bringing on His people to pray over others. We must come alive and be bold witnesses in this hour. Be revived and use this oil to "break the yoke" as you minister to others. Roll-on Anointing Oil \$10; Candle: \$12; Roll-on Anointing Oil + Candle: \$20.

For a sampling of Chuck Pierce's bizarre prophetic "ministry" visit <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5403103165515642694> , starting around minute 44 of this 52-minute video. You'll hear some of his strange prophetic utterances. To even begin to remotely understand the concept of "singing with the planets," however, you'll have to watch the entire video.

Incidentally, as favorably reported by Peter Wagner, that special "Be Revived" oil is what was used to anoint Todd Bentley by the "apostles" at his commissioning ceremony on June 23rd. When he was touched with that special anointing oil, Bentley "went down under the power," and "the power of the Holy Spirit was so heavy on that event that you could have cut it with a knife!" reported Wagner. Two days later in Lakeland, celebrated "apostle" Che' Ahn used that same special oil to personally anoint the 1,000 or so pastors who were present to be "carriers of the fire" to their churches. Forty-seven nations were represented in that meeting. Wagner also recently reported that, although "Lakeland 1" is over, "Lakeland 2" has just begun.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/david-servant/three-lessons-from-lakeland/>

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