

The Importance of a Prophetic Ministry

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the critical need for prophetic ministry in the church to address imbalances and guide believers back to God's truth.

Scripture: Isaiah 30:20

Topics: "Prophetic Ministry", "Church Balance"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the critical role of prophetic ministry in guiding believers back to the path of truth, as illustrated in Isaiah 30:20-21. He points out that many churches today have strayed either to the right or left of God's truth, often focusing too heavily on either the gifts or the fruit of the Spirit, neglecting a balanced understanding of Scripture. Poonen highlights the example of Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah and Hosea, who delivered messages tailored to the needs of their time, demonstrating that true prophets speak God's corrective word without concern for popularity. He argues that modern preachers often avoid difficult truths to maintain their honor, while prophetic voices are essential for addressing imbalances within the church. The sermon calls for a renewed appreciation for prophetic ministry that challenges and corrects the church's direction.

Transcript

"If you leave God's paths and go astray (to the right or to the left), you will hear a Voice behind you say, 'No, this is the way; walk here'" (Isa. 30:20,21 - Living). The Voice referred to here is the voice of the Holy Spirit Who alerts us when we go even slightly astray (to the right or to the left) from the straight and narrow path that leads to the throne of God. When we look at even the churches of believers today, we find that most of them have got into a rut - either to the right or to the left of the straight line of truth.

Consider just one example: Some groups over-emphasise the gifts of the Spirit and are imbalanced in one direction. Others over-emphasise the fruit of the Spirit and neglect the gifts altogether and are thus imbalanced the other way. Neither of these groups seems to be listening to the Voice that is trying to tell them to move to the left/right in order to get back to the centre. Each group has its own favourite verses from the Bible that they keep going back to again and again. They never seem to see other portions of Scripture that could make them balanced, because they are prejudiced against those verses. Very often their refusal to see those other verses is due to the fact that those other verses have been misused by the groups that have gone astray in the opposite direction. So their understanding of truth has come from a reaction to the extremes that other groups have gone to, and not from a careful study of all of God's Word.

The ministry of the prophets in the Old Testament was always to point out where Israel was going astray. They spoke forth the corrective word of the Holy Spirit. They did not seek for a "balanced ministry". They always stressed what was missing. They never wasted time speaking of the matters in Israel that were already according to God's order. In that sense, the Old Testament prophets were all imbalanced in their ministry.

Consider Jeremiah, for example. At one stage, Jeremiah said to God, "You have NEVER ONCE let me speak a word of kindness to these people. Always it is disaster, horror and destruction" (Jer.20:8 - Living). His was certainly not a balanced message, full of grace and truth!! It was just judgment, judgment and more judgment! This message became such a burden to Jeremiah himself at one stage. But he still could not quit preaching it, because every time he thought of changing the message, God's Word of judgment would burn within his heart like a fire and he could not hold it in any longer (Jer.20:9 - Living). And so he continued preaching judgment to the nation of Judah for 46 years. If Jeremiah had listened to the voice of his own reason or to the advice of other preachers who did not know the mind of God, he would have modified his message. He would then have been more balanced. But he would not have been God's prophet any longer!

Now consider the ministry of Prophet Hosea. His message was totally different from Jeremiah's. God's message through Hosea to Israel was, "O how I love you, even though you have disobeyed me and gone astray." But Jeremiah, who lived 180 years after Hosea, never sought to imitate Hosea's ministry. These prophets were not imitators of each other. Each of them knew the burden that God had given them.

A new-covenant prophet too will always speak of what is lacking in a church, and point out where it is imbalanced. He will have discernment from God about the current need of the people to whom he ministers. The greatest need in every church today is for prophetic ministry - through which the Spirit speaks saying, "No. Not that way. This way." Most preachers prepare their sermons by reading books and magazines and by listening to tapes - in order to impress their hearers. They are careful; however, to leave out whatever might offend their hearers, because they seek for honour and for gifts.

Prophets however, are not like that. They listen to God, and tell the people exactly what God wants them to hear. And so a prophet may preach on one theme repeatedly, until the imbalance in a church is corrected. Professional preachers, however, are afraid of preaching the same message even twice to the same congregation. Traveling preachers even have to make a note (in their minds or in their diaries) as to what message they preached in a particular church, so that they don't make the mistake of preaching the same message again when they visit that church a second time - lest they lose their honour as preachers!!

What a desperate need there is for prophets in our day!

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