



"You will know them by their fruits." Mt. 7:16

FALSE PROPHETS

by Art Katz

We need to be jealous for the truth of the prophetic calling, for if the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, then we cannot be careful enough in the consideration of this subject.

In Jeremiah chapter 23, God gives us a powerful statement about true and false prophets. Talk about an indictment! It is one thing to have an indictment against Israel, but when you begin to indict the prophets of Israel, when the loftiest and the best and the noblest thing has become the most profane, then that must be a symbol or a statement of the low condition of a nation prior to its judgment.

"For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found wickedness," declares the LORD' (v.11).

There is a conjunction between prophet and priest:

"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so!" (Jer.5:31a).

It is remarkable how self-serving this reciprocal thing is between heads of movements or fellowships and the false prophets, and how comfortable they are with one another and how they affirm one another. The people are in an unspoken agreement with their ministers: "You present a biblical message. We will pay the bill and have a Sunday service that will leave our lives free from any kind of demand that would really touch our true vested interest and value.

We don't want a message that is going to challenge where our heart really is.

We want to be able to say, 'Amen' and 'We've been to church'" —and that kind of thing. As the priest, so also the people. As the pastor/preacher, so also the congregation. Into that situation we have to come prophetically — and likely be stoned!

"Therefore their way will be like slippery paths to them, they will be driven away into the gloom and fall in it; for I shall bring calamity upon them, the year of their punishment," declares the LORD' (v. 12).

It implies that there is not an immediate judgment, but that there is an appointed time in which God judges those that profane His house —those who originally had authentic and holy callings. That may well be why the Lord is allowing to continue that which is presently being called prophetic and is so popular, but for them, as with the priests and prophets of old, there will be a year of visitation or a time when God calls a halt.

There is a consequence for false prophecy. It will affect the entire nation and therefore the entire church by the same principle.

"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets, 'Behold, I am going to feed them wormwood and make them drink poisonous water, for from the prophets of Jerusalem pollution has gone forth into all the land.' Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you...'" (vs. 15-16a).

Notice that God still calls them prophets. It is maybe because the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable. They

still retain their official title, but what they are performing under that title is in God's sight an abomination. There is nothing more profane than when the sacred is no longer authentically sacred.

When we take the sacred phrase, 'Thus says the Lord' and merely employ it as a device to win the attention of our hearers, then we are desecrating the sacred. We are making the sacred profane and once we have done that, what else can be hoped for? If we are not as a priestly people setting forth the distinction between the profane and the sacred, what can be hoped for in the world? The ramifications of what we are talking about are beyond any full grasp.

"They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said, 'You will have peace'; and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.'" (v.16b-17).

This must be the very quintessence of what a false prophet is, namely, the giving of a false comfort and a false assurance of peace that does not regard the truth of the conditions that need to be faced. It is an unwillingness to bring a hard word. The things that are prophesied are normally flattering and encouraging to the flesh, rather than challenging or threatening. False prophets have historically prophesied peace when there is no peace. 'Calamity will not come upon you' is unhappily the kind of prophetic statement that is coming forth even today, especially in Israel. They are giving a false comfort to those who are not even properly aligned to God. Humanly speaking, we would not see these people as those who despise God. God sees them, however, as despising Him and we need to see it as He sees it. The false prophets are actually bringing a kind of encouragement to those people who are already out of right relationship with God and give them an assurance that their relationship with God is in order.

"But who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened?" (v.18).

Here is the key verse. You almost want to put that verse in a box, as if the Lord is saying, "Of all those who not only profess to be prophets, but even those who have been called to be prophets, how many are speaking the word that can only be obtained in the council of the Lord?" Is it not remarkable how everything in God, in the last analysis, comes down to the issue of relationship?

He will never give anything independent of relationship. When He called Moses up to the Mount to receive the tablets of the law in order that he might teach them, Moses was first to come up and be there. How dare we say, "Thus says the Lord", who have not stood in the council of the Lord and heard His word? I think it is impossible for a flamboyant, gainsaying, gain-seeking minister to even be in that place. To be in the council of the Lord requires a certain humility, a certain brokenness, a certain utter dependency upon God, a certain capacity to wait and a certain separation from self-interest, fame, fortune and recognition. Men attenuated to those things cannot be in the council of the Lord, and yet they are the first ones to so readily say, "Thus says the Lord."

"But who has stood in the council of the LORD...?"

That phrase implies a closeness to God. How is it, then, that these prophets who were speaking prolifically and influencing the nation toward evil were not in this place? Why did they not get the word of the Lord out of His council and out of His presence? That there should even be a moment's hesitation about answering this question is a real statement about us! They were adulterers and walking in lies, and therefore, how can such men be in the council of God? This God is holy and you cannot come into that presence in that condition. You do not even desire to come into that place in that condition! That is why you get your words from others, or out of your own skull, *because this requires a sanctification*. This requires something about your own condition that permits that kind of relationship, particularly if it is an abiding.

Moses, who wrote the five books of Moses, could say of himself that he was the humblest man on the face of the earth. That is true humility, where we are devoid of any sense of spiritual self-consciousness. We can merely state the fact of something without any effect upon ourselves, because the humility is not a statement to our honor. Humility is not something that man can work up by himself on the earth and develop as a character trait.

Humility is what God is in Himself, and the only one who will display and exhibit it, is that one who has been *consistently in the presence of God*. It is humbling to be there and that is why Moses could state it not as a credit to himself, but to God, out of whose presence that humility was established. **God requires still that His prophetic men be in His presence.**

I want to say that there is nothing more difficult for anyone than this requirement. Everything contends against it—the dinner bell, the faucet is dripping, the light bulb needs to be changed, the dogs need to be fed—a thousand things continually nipping at you that require attention. Even if that were not so, there is something about the pulse of the flesh itself that is inimical and opposed to seeking the Lord. Seeking the Lord is an extraordinarily difficult thing and few have sufficient incentive. It is a suffering, and in fact, just to be more ruthlessly honest, it is a dying. Living on the earth, in the flesh, in the world and in time, and to confide and to commune with God, is an extraordinary and ultimate attainment. If you attain it, then maintain it, because you do not want to have to do it all over again. Can you maintain it and still go to last night's birthday party, and dancing, and hooting, and singing, and stomping and not lose it or be jarred from your sensitive spiritual place by what seems to be just a time of fun? We are talking about something very critical. I would not expect in the earth today many men who are in this place. What then shall we say for the whole rash of prophets that have arisen in recent years for there are many men professing to be prophets, but are we hearing the council of God? God's judgment about the failure to obtain His word in that place is severe.

“I did not send these prophets, but they ran; I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds” (vs. 21-22).

We can know when the word is out of the council of God because it has this salutary effect. It will affect the nation or fellowship in turning it toward God, rather than away from Him and from their evil ways and their practices.

I can remember a full gospel breakfast where the speaker was from Sweden, a leading evangelical personality, but it could have been anywhere. He was wearing a Gucci shirt and tie and a silk-type suit, and he began by saying, “The Lord has spoken to me this morning and given me a word for you.” I leaned forward to catch every syllable that had come from the heart of God. As I heard it, however, there was nothing from God at all, but clichés, evangelical phrases and full gospel hogwash. The men who were hearing that word that morning, and nodding their heads, and “amening”, applauding and affirming, need to know that there are consequences when we allow that kind of monumental lie to be expressed and not to be contradicted. It will deaden and dull our sensitivity so that the next time we will be an even greater candidate for deception for anything that comes down the pike.

There needed to be someone in that audience that morning to get up and say, “I am sorry for whatever pain and dislocation I am going to cause, but I cannot allow that phrase and that statement to be made in our hearing without being contested. That was not the word of God and we dare not allow that kind of terminology to be employed merely to sanctify or to give a kind of credibility to what is otherwise just an ordinary statement.” How often is that being done and to what extent has our failure to do so had a negative effect on the church today? We have paid much for cheap, casual references to God, as if we could invoke Him at pleasure or say, “God gave”, when He did not give.

That is why there are false prophets. That is why, if I can say it, the Charismatic and kindred movements themselves are kind of false movements, wanting the effulgence of the Spirit and the excitement and the activity, **but evading the cross and the necessity for suffering** out of which the Spirit of God is given as solace, comfort and power. We come back again and again to the cross. The false prophet speaks words of comfort when God would not have His people to be comforted, but to be agitated. True prophets can bear the reprisal, the rejection and the mortification of that word coming back into their own teeth. They can bear giving the word and then someone cueing the piano player to drown it out. Prophetic anguish is to bring the word of God and then to have it refused and come right back into your teeth. It is mortifying and the antithesis of the joy and the gratification that comes when the word of God flows out of you, and through, and into the people who are receiving it. That is like tonic for your soul. We have to be as willing for the one as the other, or we will not speak the other. The call to the prophet is the call to the cross. It is a frequent, if not continual form of suffering

of an exquisite and ultimate kind. Can we say, "Thus says the Lord" without actually articulating those words or implying those words in your statement, except that your word has come through the cross? It is out of a death. It is not your own word, but His, which can only come from that cross-centered place.

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