

## KINGS AND PROPHETS

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I believe God pays close attention to the ways of kings and prophets. There is a direct relationship between the moral condition of a nation and the choices of its political and spiritual leaders.

We seldom use the terms “kings” and “prophets” anymore, but these institutions of leadership still continue in the eyes of God. The political office of “king” has been replaced by titles like President and Prime Minister, and by institutions such as the Congress, Senate, or Parliament. The spiritual office of “prophet” continues today in the roles of pastors, priests, ministers, and clergy.

In the Old Testament, God’s people were familiar with both offices, and it was not uncommon that good prophets served the Jewish nation during the reign of bad kings. For example, the prophet Samuel served during the reign of Saul, Elijah served during Ahab, Jeremiah during Jehoiakim, and so on.

When the political leaders dropped the ball, the ministry of God’s prophets kept spiritual accountability in the mix. As long as the prophets said and did what God told them to say and do, the national condition was never completely hopeless. Things could get really bad – and sometimes they did - yet God’s loyal prophets could prompt a carnal generation to turn completely around.

But the Scriptures show that kings of early history seldom tolerated being told their choices were wrong. Those who did tell them such things were killed. And so these kings were predictably surrounded by bootlickers: people who flattered them, appeased them, and let the kings have their way. I must say as I look around now, things haven’t changed much.

Those biblical conditions were perilous for anyone who dared to speak the truth, because unlike the ubiquitous “yes-men,” the true prophets of God were never mindless acolytes. God’s prophets embodied courage. They were the conscience of the nation. They said what needed to be said to whomever most needed to hear it - even if it was not “politically correct” to do so.

A story from the Bible that illustrates this tension is one featuring King Ahab. The King sought Elijah, and when he found him Ahab asked, *“Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”* Ahab had a wide blind spot, so Elijah opened his eyes, *“I have not made trouble for Israel, but you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the Lord’s commands...”* (I Kings 18:17-18).

Elijah’s words were straight to the point, but the medicine of truth is most effective when it’s not sugared. Remarkably, Ahab repented (I Kings 21:27). Somewhere deep, buried under the layers of his pride and arrogance, Ahab knew Elijah was spot on. When a prophet responsibly declares the Word of God and divides right from wrong, good from bad, wisdom from foolishness, and truth from lies, the Holy Spirit will minister to proper effect - - even to an arrogant and corrupt king.

It’s also true that a plain declaration of God’s Word can result in repentance from an entire group of people. Remember Ninevah? God granted His mercy and withheld His wrath when a clear message of pending judgment was responsibly delivered to the city. Again, the simple truth had profound effect. When things are said that should be said, it acts as a preserving agent.

But what happens when the king and his nation need to be confronted and be told they are no longer honoring God's commands, but the prophets do not do this? What happens when the prophets stay silent, look the other way, dilute the message, or even support the king's misconduct? In other words, what becomes of a nation when its political *and* spiritual leaders are both woefully ineffective? It's not an encouraging picture, and regrettably I believe this is the picture that defines America today.

The prophetic voice that's most needed in this country right now is one that holds firm to the Word of God, one that boldly confronts sin, and one that ignores the suffocating tentacles of the PC police to "call a spade a spade." Political correctness is seldom a friend of sound doctrine, so placating those who predictably cry "Foul!" is only guaranteed to dull the keen edge of truth.

And this is important to consider because two alarming situations have developed for us: one from the kings and the other from the prophets. Kings lead by power and law since these things are necessary to preserve order in a society. But the kings have mishandled their power and ignored the rules. Order is now collapsing, and so is our civilized culture. On the other hand, prophets lead by truth and example because these things are necessary to preserve God's standards. But the prophets have diluted the truth and eroded their calling. God's standards are disintegrating as entire bodies of believers now doubt the fundamentals of the faith.

However, forget the bad kings for a moment because – let's be honest here - ineffective kings have always been around, and it's categorically foolish to try to legislate our country's path to spiritual renewal. That's not where the emphasis should be. That's not the change that's most urgently needed.

The turnaround that's most needed in this country right now is from those within the church. To gain this, today's prophets must plainly declare the warnings of Scripture from the pulpit. They must confront sin by God's standards and not by the ideals of humanist agendas. They must teach what God's Word says and not what they wish it said. They must deal with the entirety of the Bible and not just portions of it. They must give wide berth to the impotent themes of popular culture and emphasize instead the potency of unpopular truth. But, these things are hardly happening, and the net effect is the salt is losing its flavor (Matt. 5:13). It's naïve to believe the church's present choices and values are not contributing to God's judgments on our nation.

My words here will likely upset the crowd that wants their church to be attractive to the lost. They will probably offend the ranks of those who wish to constantly draw attention to the positive benefits of the Christian life. But enticing the lost is not what saves them any more than sipping doctrine through a straw provides a strong biblical foundation. The fact is it's much easier to tickle itchy ears with milky devotionals of mutual cooperation than to incur the bruises of a meaty confrontation (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

We're in a tight spot. Our kings are high-fiving themselves for every step they take away from virtue, and our prophets are patting themselves on the back for every step they take towards apostasy. The first group cares little for the truth about responsibility, and the second group cares little about responsibly telling the truth.

In the movie, "A Few Good Men," Jack Nicholson's character thundered, "You can't handle the truth!" I feel many of today's prophets can't handle the truth that they are enabling our nation's shameful state of affairs. So we euphorically sing about new generations rising up with selfless faith to near revivals, but that's only willful pretense. It's not reality – not here anyways. A "new generation" in the US is departing

from the truth in record numbers. The Barna Group, a leading research organization, says less than one-half of one percent of Christians between the ages of 18–23 have a biblical worldview, defined as believing:

- that absolute moral truth exists,
- that the Bible is completely inerrant,
- that Satan is a real being, and not symbolic,
- that a person cannot earn their way into the kingdom of God though good works,
- that Jesus Christ was God incarnate and lived a sinless life on earth, and
- that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and reigns over the whole universe today.

This problem with our young people is due, in large part, to the problem with our prophets. Swelling ranks of church leaders no longer believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, the deity of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the promises of Jesus Christ, and the return of Jesus Christ. Bluntly put, they really don't know Jesus Christ at all!

The abysmal failure of today's prophets recalls the Church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22). That church's problems were many, but looming large were its arrogance and self-satisfaction. Though it was in dire need of a genuine faith, the Laodicean church felt it was doing just fine. It failed to see itself accurately, and this describes far too many churches in America today. They are not only turning away from truth, but in thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to, they are also delusional.

The story of Ahab and Elijah introduces a sobering fact: those who turn away from the Word of God invite serious trouble. And when the judgment of God comes (and it will), it will be their own fault. I believe we're seeing the beginning of the end now.

Some of my readers will undoubtedly close their eyes and place their hands over their ears at this point as they "LaLaLa" their way to their own nirvana. But according to Scripture, five qualities characterize the church of the latter days, and whether one wishes to accept this or not, it's easy to see the role of today's prophets with these things right here right now:

1. GIVE UP – The church of the latter days will *give up* traditional, strong, convicting truth and corrective teachings. It will opt instead for popular themes and approaches that upset nobody, sedate everybody, include anybody, and ignore "Somebody." (2 Tim. 4:3-4).
2. COUGH UP – The church of the latter days will be rich in resources, and it will *cough up* money for new buildings, new programs, new salaries, new campaigns, new equipment, and this list is virtually endless. Obsessed with money, the church will meet about it, talk about it, teach about it, pray for more of it, and worry about less of it. (Rev. 3:14-20).
3. TURN UP – The church of the latter days will *turn up* its nose at prophecy, specifically the literal prophecies surrounding Jesus Christ's second return. Rather than grasping the immense value of prophecy in the believer's life, the church will mock it, doubt it, shun it, twist it, and even ban it. (2 Thess. 2:5; 2 Pet. 3:3-4).
4. SET UP – The church of the latter days will *set up* people, practices, and programs to convince itself it is thriving. Rather than measuring itself by God's standards, it will instead embrace false teachers, false signs, false wonders, false faith, and false values. (Matt. 24:24).

5. THROW UP – The church of the latter days will cause God to *throw up*. He will see it as comprehensively lukewarm, categorically lethargic, and completely lost. (Rev. 3:16).

A hard fact that emerges from this five-point outline is responsible prophets speak the full truth while irresponsible ones don't. Because it's the full approach that exposes who we really are and how we're really doing, it is inherently confrontational to what we want to believe about ourselves and the world we live in. And that's exactly what makes the entire Word of God so vital in tenuous times as these.

To underscore this point, let's look at the gospel as an example. The gospel is a popular theme in pulpits today - as it should be. Concurrently, new coalitions are infatuated with it and discussion forums obsess about it. Sermons are manipulated to conform to it. Sunday school curriculums are designed around it, and pressure increases on multiple fronts to interpret every single passage of Scripture by it. And while all these trends and passions mount, more young people are falling away from it. Something is terribly wrong here. We're missing something.

When the angel of Rev. 14:6-7 declares the "eternal gospel" to the whole world, it's a divinely-mandated disclosure. But it's not the easy-to-swallow, user-friendly, seeker-sensitive delivery of the pabulum we typically hear today. There is no goal in the angel's words to be attractive to the lost. There is no agenda to identify with one group or to avoid offending another. Instead, the message will be in-your-face, confrontational, brief, - and by every one of today's tepid standards, it will be "politically incorrect."

Oh, yes – and it will also be very effective!

Today's prophets need to see a standard in that angel's message. For starters, the gospel declared by the angel is comprehensive. It starts with creation and it ends with judgment. That's one way of saying the proper gospel message stretches from Genesis to Revelation. There's no emphasis on the New Testament. There's no focus on promoting Christian community, making the unsaved feel welcome, or developing good neighbor habits. The angel's gospel message is the entire Word of God delivered with urgency.

Secondly, the angel's gospel message leaves no wiggle room. Andrew Murray said, "To convince the world of the truth of Christianity, it must first be convinced of sin. It is only sin that renders Christ intelligible."

Let's put Murray's quote another way: "The gospel makes most sense when it is plainly stated alongside a frank declaration of the presence and consequences of sin." That's the sort of gospel message that has always changed lives. But it's difficult to communicate this sort of gospel in churches where genuine preaching is set aside in favor of "having a conversation," where judgment is never mentioned, where sin is seldom defined, and where true remorse is hardly encouraged. Summarily speaking, it's difficult for the prophets to promote repentance when they are not doing their job!

Let's return to our original issue and confess that, yes, kings will fail! And yes, prophets will let us down too. But we cannot afford protracted, widespread, and willful collapse of essential duties on both fronts at the same time. Unfortunately, that's happening – right now! - in the good ol' USA.

In these precarious circumstances, the burden of immediate accountability lies with the prophets who, unlike the kings, claim to conduct their lives with eternal objectives. And if the prophets don't see the situation for what it is, then those they claim to serve should speak out. The bottom line is the church

was never commissioned to provide pulpit pep talks to make the unsaved feel welcome but which are more effective at keeping God outside the door.

As long as it's still here, the church continues to be God's representative on the earth, but it finds itself in a weak spot. Given the graduating spiritual crisis in this country, it's silly to chase popular songs that have zero foundation in reality, and it's recalcitrant to applaud a host of standards which cozy up to Christian culture rather than Christlikeness.

For those who are unwilling to regard the church's present condition as falling well short of its divinely-designated duties, then they must be prepared to claim instead that it's acting in a righteous, reverent, and responsible posture before an Almighty God who is returning soon in judgment. While some may wish to argue this point, I'm not with that crowd. I feel strongly that the church needs to develop calloused knees, soften calloused hearts, and confront its own calloused people.

Till such time as that may come, I feel we are indeed the Laodicean church. We are broken, wretched, and naked. The best thing that can be said about us is we are lukewarm – and by Biblical standards, that's absolutely tragic! We defend a premise that isn't and we perpetuate things we shouldn't.

We are marinated in a form of godliness but we have no real power (2 Tim. 3:5). Instead, we celebrate mediocrity, and we despise those who shed any light on the real problems. It is critical that we strain our ears and listen for the soft knock that's being drowned out by our own self-indulgent antics. We need to repent and humbly invite God back into our fellowship. This is our nation's only hope!

I'll wrap up here by putting these important issues into historical perspective. Alexis De Tocqueville, the French political thinker from the 1800's once noted of our country, "I looked throughout America to find where her greatness originated. I looked for it in her harbors and on her shorelines, in her fertile fields and boundless prairies, and in her gold mines and vast world commerce, but it was not there. It was not until I went to the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her success. America is great because she is good, and if America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

Alexis De Tocqueville got it right. There is a direct connection between the health of our nation and the health of our churches. Today's prophets must repent themselves and once again blaze truth from their pulpits.

Our nation's prognosis – indeed, its very survival! - depends on this.