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Reflections on Being a Prophetic Voice in Contemporary Society

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| Session Layout

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2. Brief Overview: The Prophetic Voice
3. The Prophet in Popular Culture
4. The Prophet in the Biblical World
5. Being a Prophetic Voice
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1. | Framing our Conversation

Matt 11:7-19 *A Personal Reflection*

The Prophets; John the Prophet ; Jesus

The Kingdom of God

What is the Kingdom of God like?

Isaiah 40:6-8 (cf. 1 Pet 1:24-25) | “6 A voice says, ‘Call out.’ Then he answered, ‘What shall I call out?’ All flesh is like grass, and all its beauty is like the flower in the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”

2. | The Prophetic Voice

(a)

Speaking for God: His VOICE

“The canonical prophets, whose books make up over a quarter of the OT, were called by God to be organs and channels of revelation. They were men of God who stood in his council (Jer 23:22), knew his mind, and were enabled to declare it. God the Holy Spirit spoke in and through them (2 Pet 1:19-21; Isa 61:1; Mic 3:8; Acts 28:25-27; 1 Pet 1:10-12). They knew he was doing so; hence they dared to start messages with ‘this is what the LORD says’ or ‘an oracle of the LORD,’ and to present Yahweh himself as the speaker of what they were saying.” (JI Packer)

Qualifications?

Silence | Insight | Speech

2. | The Prophetic Voice

(b)

SILENCE (Trial and Intimacy)

Luther on What makes a Theologian: (*Theology of the Cross vs. Glory*)

Oratio | Prayer (Dependence and Expectation)

Meditatio | Meditation (Biblical Study and Reflection)

Tentatio | Trial (*Anfechtung*)

INSIGHT (God-granted)

Apocalyptic insight ("Oh, so this is the true state of things?")

SPEECH (Speaking God's Truth)

Made to speak; Received words; For ears to hear ... (cf. Isa 6)

2. | The Prophetic Voice

(c)

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To be that voice ...

James 5:7-11 | “10 As an example, brethren, of *suffering* and *patience*, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.” [But note: Application to whom?]

Lonely; Marginalised; Poor; Disempowered; Disenfranchised

BUT, a seed that does not fall to the ground, will not sprout ...

Parable of the Sower | God is worthy of our trust

Sing, Praise, Rejoice | God is worthy of our worship

3. | The Prophet in Popular Culture

A Visionary Recluse? (artists, religious fanatics, revolutionaries)

Qualification [cf. List]: Passion; “Truth to Power”; Social Justice Warrior

Restless Experientialists; Entrenched Intellectuals; Disaffected Deviationists

Q: Is a prophet a culture-warrior?

Q: Is a prophet a visionary?

“A vision without a promise, is just a fantasy” (Bono)

Q: What about false claims to be prophet?

No, a prophet is mouthpiece, a witness (NT) for the God who has a Name

God Rules by His Speech: Hebrews 1:1-4

4. | The Prophet in the Biblical World (a)

Sam Storms | “A prophet’s primary function in the Old Testament (OT) was to serve as God’s representative or ambassador by communicating God’s word to his people. True prophets never spoke on their own authority or shared their personal opinions, but rather delivered the message God himself gave them. ... [...]

It would be a mistake to think of prophets in the OT as only predicting the future. Their primary role was to make known the holiness of God and the covenant obligations; to denounce injustice, idolatry, and empty ritualism; and to call God’s covenant people, Israel, to repentance and faithfulness. In the period leading up to the exile and Judah’s deportation to Babylon in the sixth century BC, the prophets often delivered messages denouncing rampant social injustice and the oppression of the poor. In the postexilic period, the prophets turn their attention more specifically to the promise of national renewal and the spiritual blessings that come with trusting God and obeying his will. ... [...]”

4. | The Prophet in the Biblical World (b)

Qualifications |

Divine Calling; Direct Communication with God;
Faithfulness to God's Word; Alignment with God's Will;
Covenant Upholders; Moral Integrity;
Authenticity of Prophecies; Persecution and Opposition

Unusual Actions |

Ezekiel (lay on his side ..); Hosea (married an unfaithful woman)
Isaiah (walked around naked); Jeremiah (wore a yoke);
Elijah (contested the Baal prophets); Jonah (the great fish)
Agabus (Paul's belt) etc.

5. | Being a Prophetic Voice

(a)

God rules by His Speech

Carson: Prophecy from the Centre (Gospel proclamation)

Richard Baxter | “Christ hath purposely appointed his greatest church-officers to be ministers, even the servants of all, to rule and save men as volunteers, without coercive power, by the management of his powerful Word upon their consciences.”

Jl Packer | “The ministry of the apostles brought instruction directly from God to his people, just as the OT prophetic ministry had done, though the form of presentation was different. Prophets of the NT period were linked with the apostles in the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20; 3:5) as expositors of the fulfilment in Christ of OT hopes (Rom 16:25-27).” Cf. 2 Pet 1:16-21; 1 Pet 1:10-12

5. | Being a Prophetic Voice

(b)

Culture—the touchstone of theological articulation

Stott—*Dual Listening* | Luther—*Speaking for hearing*

Biblical Fidelity matched to **Spiritual Insight** matched to **Cultural Wisdom**

Calvin's *penetrating truth*, Peterson's *cultural literary eloquence*,

Schaeffer's *insight*, Lewis' *psychology*, Wilson's *wit* etc. etc.

The Church—Culture *christened*, but not *baptised*?

Question: Cultivating a prophetic voice ... how?

5. | Being a Prophetic Voice

(c)

a. **Cast to the Margins ...** (a Kingdom ministry will ...)

find itself on the margins; hold the minority viewpoint

suffer oppression, opposition; will step in the footsteps of Jesus

b. **But Speaking from the Centre** (a Kingdom ministry will ...)

be faithful and biblical; humble and serving; a Word ministry

c. **What about Culture?** About our world

How to interpret the times?; Culture-wars (Christ against Culture?)

The problem with the culture within the church

“Out-narrating” the culture

6. | *Questions for Reflection and Discussion*

Personal reflection:

How did Jesus enter your story?

But when did you enter his story?

Ministry evaluation:

What word do you think it is expected of you to speak by God?

What ministry is culturally expected of you?

Where are your insecurities? Where are your ministry idols?

What Word does the NT speak? Do you speak that Word?

Does your life reflect that Word?

Do you speak of people *before* God as much as speaking to them *about* God?

Are the messages you bring from God, or do they reflect your own desires?