



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

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PROPHETS OF GOD IN THE FIRST-CENTURY CHURCH

Fulfilled Bible prophecy is evidence that the Bible’s message came from the mind of God. We thrill to read of the foretelling of the virgin birth of the Christ (Isaiah 7), the coming fall of Babylon (Isaiah 13), and the influential role of King Cyrus (Isaiah 44). Each of those memorable prophecies is found in the Old Testament. But what about prophets in the New Testament church?

A group of Christians in the first century were called prophets. Jesus “*gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers*” (Ephesians 4:11). Paul made this observation about the mystery of the Christ, the message of salvation which was revealed to mankind in its fullness in the first century: “*which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets*” (Ephesians 3:5). Again, those were first-century prophets in God’s church. Paul also reminded the saints in Corinth, “*And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles . . .*” (1 Corinthians 12:28). Yes, by the will of God there were prophets in His church in the first century.

Does the Bible tell us the names of any of those who were prophets in the first century? It does. Prophets (plural) came to Antioch when Barnabas and Paul were laboring with the church there. One of them, Agabus, predicted the coming of a great famine (Acts 11:27,28). What about in the Antioch church? The Bible lists the names of some of the prophets and teachers who labored there (Acts 13:1). We further read that Silas and Judas were prophets (Acts 15:22,32).

What role did prophets play in the church? While prophets did at times predict future events, their work was not limited to foretelling. Hear this contrast between speaking in tongues and prophecy: “*Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe*” (1 Corinthians 14:22). In that same context, we read, “*But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men*” (1 Corinthians 14:3). Again, “*For*

you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged” (1 Corinthians 14:31). So, prophets spoke. They spoke so people could learn. They spoke in order to edify, exhort, and comfort God’s people. We already mentioned the prophets Judas and Silas. Note what is said about their efforts when they went to Antioch: “*Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words*” (Acts 15:32). The prophets’ work benefitted the church!

From where did the prophets receive their messages? The power to prophesy was granted to certain members of the church by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7,10,11). Let us go back to Ephesians 3:5, where it is written that the mystery of God “*has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.*” First-century prophets were guided miraculously to reveal God’s gospel of salvation. Because that is true, since such writers as Mark and Luke were not apostles, we recognize them as prophets.

As the Spirit guided Paul to address matters pertaining to the proper use of miraculous gifts in connection with public worship, He gave this instruction: “*Let all things be done for edification . . . Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent . . . And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets*” (1 Corinthians 14:26,29,30,32). Thus, the prophets’ activities were to be guided by the regulations laid out by the Spirit.

What about the duration of the prophets’ role? The Bible says that, like other miraculous gifts granted by the Spirit were to cease and vanish away, “*. . . prophecies, they will fail . . .*” (1 Corinthians 13:8). That statement points to the *temporary* nature of the gift of prophecy — prophecy, along with other spiritual gifts, was part of a temporary arrangement. When “*that which is perfect*” came (1 Corinthians 13:10, that is, when the complete truth of God had been revealed, there would be no more need for prophets. We thank God for the work done by first-century prophets, but today there are no true prophets.

-- Roger D. Campbell

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM DAVID SPARING KING SAUL

King Saul was granted the privilege of being the first human king to rule over the nation of Israel. The message of 1 Samuel 18 shows how the relationship between Saul and a young man named David was soured. When Saul heard some in Israel praising David more than they praised the king himself, he was extremely upset. Saul was angry, he was afraid of David, he kept his eye on him, he counted David as an enemy, and more than once he tried to kill him. To put it mildly, in his dealings with David, Saul was not a very nice person.

Now let us fast-forward to the twenty-fourth chapter of 1 Samuel. What is recorded in this chapter shows a clear distinction between the character of Saul and David, whom God chose to succeed Saul as king. We read that Saul took three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David and the band of outcasts who accompanied him (1 Samuel 24:2). Things did not turn out as Saul had imagined, however. Instead of Saul being in a position to take David's life, just the opposite scenario developed. David had the opportunity to put Saul to death, and those with David urged him to kill the monarch, but David refused to do so. On that occasion, David demonstrated great strength of character. What lessons can we learn from this memorable piece of history found in 1 Samuel 24:1-22?

- David had great respect for Saul's position and authority. In fact, after David cut off a corner of Saul's robe, his heart immediately troubled him for having done so. David said to his men, "*The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD*" (24:6). We, too, should have respect for the Lord's anointed One, who is Jesus the Christ. The Father wants us to honor His Son in the same way we honor Him (John 5:23). Let us speak of and approach the anointed of God with reverence.

- In other instances, David showed signs of weakness, but in this case he practiced self-control. Rather than lash out at Saul in anger with a vengeful spirit, he spared him. David verbalized his thinking to Saul, telling the king, ". . . *the LORD delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed'*" (24:10). Christians also need to be people who practice self-control (Galatians 5:22,23), and David's example reminds us that it is possible for any person to control his speech and action. The challenge is to do so consistently!

- Just because two people are at odds with one another, that does not necessarily mean that both persons are acting sinfully. David did not sin in his dealings with Saul, as he reminded the king: ". . . *know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it*" (24:11).

- Rather than try to get even with Saul by using carnal maneuvers, David left matters in God's hands to carry out *His* will. David told Saul, "*Therefore let the LORD be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case . . .*" (24:15). When we have been wronged, rather than lash out at the one who has injured us, let us recall what Paul quoted to the saints in Rome: "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay says the Lord*" (Romans 12:19).

- Saul admitted David's gracious treatment of him, saying, "*You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil*" (24:17). David's behavior really hits home with us when we struggle to overcome hard feelings against those who have wronged us. David's example says, "Yes, it really *is* possible to reward good for evil." In truth, that is what our Lord expects from all of us (Romans 12:17,21).

- Unlike Saul, David never counted Saul as a personal adversary. After David spared Saul's life, the king observed, "*For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely?*" (24:19). Saul confessed that David did not perceive him as an enemy. David suffered as an innocent man at the hands of the king. David had not wronged Saul, yet Saul wanted to destroy him. If we receive such unfair treatment, let us not grow weary in doing what is right. And let us strive to treat others with kindness, regardless of how they treat us.

- David promised Saul that he would not destroy Saul's offspring (24:20-22). It has been a common practice throughout history for conquerors to wipe out the offspring of the rulers whom they overthrown. Why? To prevent them from trying to come back into power. David had no such fears and pledged he would not hold Saul's personal wrongs done toward David against Saul's descendants.

The biblical record makes it plain that David was far from being a perfect person. Yet, from the manner in which he willfully spared Saul's life and held no malice against him (1 Samuel 24:1-22), we can see a number of practical lessons. May each one of us imitate the spirit of Jesus, whose intent each day was to do the Father's will, not His own (John 6:38).

-- Roger D. Campbell

DO YOU FIND WORSHIP BORING?

“Boring is defined as someone or something dull or uninteresting” [www.yourdictionary.com]. As humans, we find certain things and certain people interesting; at the same time, hearing someone discuss other topics may put us to sleep, as we have zero interest in those matters.

It is a natural human response to avoid activities which we find boring. As far as people go, we may not try to avoid completely those folks whom we find uninteresting, but we may make an effort not to get stuck listening to them speak for a long period of time.

What about worship? We refer to worshipping the God of heaven. The principles we will discuss would apply to every instance of worshipping God, regardless of the place or number of people involved, but in this article we are speaking specifically about worshipping the Lord God in the assembly of a local church on the first day of the week.

You may or may not be aware of this truth: some members of God’s family consider their worship experience to be boring. Because of that, they struggle. They struggle with guilt because they know they need to attend and participate in the services (forsaking such assembling is unacceptable, Hebrews 10:25), but the worship in which they engage “does not do anything for” them. That makes them contemplate skipping services, which makes them feel guilty again. They feel caught in this guilt trap when, as they see it, their dilemma would be eliminated if the worship were not so boring.

“I mean, think about it, we sing some songs that were written two hundred years ago. Yawn, yawn.” We personally love some of the more modern songs. We also love some of the oldies, but goodies. A long time ago, we realized that a spiritual song’s Scripturalness and appeal to hearts that are devoted to the Lord has nothing to do with the historical year in which a human wrote the lyrics or tune. A song is not “amazing” or “lousy” because of the era in which it was written or the tempo with which it is led.

God calls on us to approach Him with lips and hearts which are in tune with one another (Mark 7:6). He wants us to worship “in spirit” (John 4:24), which would be a *sincere* pouring out of praise *from the heart*. God calls on all Christians to sing, as He says, “*singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:19). The prisoners Silas and Paul prayed and sang hymns to God at midnight (Acts 16:25). We do not get the impression that doing so bored them out of their minds.

For some reason, the Psalmist looked forward to going to the place of worship: “*I was glad when they*

said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD’” (Psalm 122:1). His heart was ready for the worship experience. We further read in the book of Psalms, “*Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker*” (Psalm 95:6). A heart that loves and reveres the Maker will be prepared to bow before Him to honor and praise Him.

When we pour out our hearts in prayer to our Father, offering our thanks, making known our requests, and confessing our failures (Philippians 4:6,7), there is nothing boring about that, my friend! Sure, the voice of the young man who leads the prayer might crack because he is nervous, and the elderly brother who guides our prayer may stumble over a word or two, but how blessed we are to be God’s family and have the privilege of worshipping Him!

When we make our financial contribution, giving bountifully and cheerfully so the church can preach to lost people (2 Corinthians 9:6,7), that is not a boring undertaking, is it? When we break bread and our minds go back to the torture that our Savior endured for us on the cross (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), there is nothing boring about that, would you not agree?

When the living word of the living God is presented, that allows us to grow — grow in knowledge, grow in faith, grow in commitment, and grow closer to the One Who gave us that powerful message. Surely the word that lives and gives life (1 Peter 1:23-25) does not bore us when we hear it.

One sister whom we know travels three hours each Sunday in order to worship the Creator according to the New Testament pattern — that is three hours in *one* direction, then three *more* hours to get back home. Why would a person be motivated to do such a thing? She is in love with the One Whom she worships, and that makes all the difference in the world!

About a year ago, a seven-year old boy said, “Grandma, wouldn’t it be great if we could go to Bible class and worship *every* day?!” I hope that precious grandson of mine never loses such an attitude.

See if this sounds familiar. Soccer and hockey are boring, and you have no interest in them. But, that all changes when you have a child or grandchild who plays. What changes? You love one of the players (or coaches) and you learn the rules of the game. With your new understanding and interest, you now love the game! What has happened? Your attitude changed and you became a lover of that which you once found to be boring. The same thing can happen to a worshipper: he can go from being bored to being excited about worship. It is all about the heart.

-- Roger D. Campbell

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 – THE GOSPEL

The theme of the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is “The Resurrection.” Paul writes about Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead, he notes the consequences which would follow if there were no resurrection, and he speaks of the future resurrection which will occur when the Christ comes again.

We want to look at the first eight verses of this chapter, noting the truth which Paul communicates about the gospel. What does this section of Scripture reveal about the gospel, the good news of salvation through God’s Son? First, let us consider verses one through four:

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

❶ The gospel is a message that can be preached. It is the message which Paul preached in Corinth (15:1). Jesus charged His followers to declare that message to every person in the world (Mark 16:15). That is what the Lord’s church is all about – telling others the good news about Jesus and His salvation. In a world of disturbing and depressing activities, the gospel is always a needed message. The world could use some good news, and God’s gospel supplies *the best* news anyone could ever hear!

❷ Here are some things that those who hear the gospel can do with it: the gospel message can be believed (15:2), received (15:1), stood in (15:1), and held fast (15:2). In fact, those words describe how every human *ought to respond* to the gospel: believe it, receive it, stand in it, and hold fast to it. The sad reality, though, is most people choose not to believe and receive the gospel. Equally tragic is the truth that among those who initially accept the gospel, there are many who at some point in their lives stop following it. Their latter state (not submitting to the gospel) is worse than their original condition before they obeyed the gospel (2 Peter 2:20-22).

❸ Salvation is by the gospel (15:2). That reminds us of Romans 1:16, where it is written, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*” If you and I care about the souls of lost people, and if we want to know what is available to get their attention and save them

from sin, there is no need to spend fruitless hours trying to come up with something fascinating. God already has supplied what saves man’s soul from sin and it is the good news of salvation through Jesus. Brethren, the gospel has the power to change people’s thinking, change their lives, change their relationship with the Lord, and change their eternal destiny. The gospel saves! The Bible says so.

❹ Paul declares these gospel facts: (1) the Christ died for our sins, (2) He was buried, and (3) He rose again the third day (15:3,4). Each of those facts is substantiated in the record of Jesus’ earthly life which is given by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Jesus not only died, He died for our sins, dying in our place that we might be redeemed through His blood. He died for our sins “*according to the Scriptures*” (15:3), as His death was foretold in Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 53:4-6).

When Jesus’ soul went to Hades after His death, it did not remain there. Why not? Because He was raised from the dead! (Acts 2:27-31). When? On the third day, which was the first day of the week (Mark 16:1,2,9).

Let us go back and quote the next four verses in 1 Corinthians (following Paul’s references to Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection):

5, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

❺ There were witnesses of the gospel – hundreds of them! (15:5-8). After Jesus rose from dead, He was seen by His followers on multiple occasions. According to 1 Corinthians 15:6, in one instance over five hundred people saw the risen Savior. Seeing Him with their own eyes qualified them to speak as witnesses about that event (Acts 22:15). The resurrection of Jesus is a verifiable historical event.

1 Corinthians 15:18 reminds us of the greatness of God’s gospel. We thank God for the wonderful news that sinners can be saved through Jesus’ sacrifice, and we thank Him for the gospel’s power. It is special!

-- Roger D. Campbell

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