

Calling All Jonahs: Don't Run if You Are Called to Speak!

I did it again. On a recent Sunday I stood in a pulpit, looked out over a congregation of mostly strangers, cleared the lump in my throat and preached a message that the Lord had laid on my heart from the Bible.

Thousands of men and women speak publicly like this every week. It's what preachers do. No big deal. But even though I speak often, I've found that preaching the gospel is one of the most frightening assignments anyone could attempt. I feel as if I die a thousand deaths right before I do it, and I die several more times after I go home and evaluate what happened.

After one discouraging experience in which an audience stared coldly at me with their arms folded, I determined that preaching surely must not be my calling. I shared my struggle with an older pastor.

"Sometimes I feel discouraged after I speak," I said. "Does that ever happen to you?" I was sure he would counsel me to stop preaching.

His answer shocked me. "Son, I feel that way every Monday morning."

When I tell friends that I stubbornly resisted the call of God to preach because of my lack of confidence, they act surprised. They think most people who stand in pulpits want to be there.

Think again! We assume God chooses gifted orators who hone their skills like doctors who learn surgery or actors who learn to perform on stage. But true preaching is not a natural exercise—it is one of the most supernatural tasks anyone can ever be called to do. It requires an imperfect human vessel to

yield himself (or herself) to speak the very words of God.

If we do this in the flesh, the results are miserable; if we wholly trust the power of the Spirit, prophetic preaching unleashes supernatural anointing.

Most preachers in the Bible were reluctant. Moses made excuses about stuttering, Gideon tried to disqualify himself, and Jeremiah complained about the responsibility of carrying a prophetic burden. Jonah bought a one-way ticket to the other side of the Mediterranean Sea so he wouldn't have to give his unpopular sermon.

And the apostle Paul, who was a silver-tongued Pharisee before he met Christ, was stripped of his eloquence before he preached throughout the Roman Empire. He told the Corinthians: "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:3-5, NASB).

Charismatic revivalist Arthur Katz, who died seven years ago, wrote about the power of true preaching in his 1999 book *Apostolic Foundations*: "The only one qualified to preach ... is the one who wants to run the other way, like Jonah. ... The man who sighs and groans when called upon to speak, who does not want to be there, who feels terribly uncomfortable ... is the man out of whose mouth the word of true preaching is most likely to come."

That is certainly not the way most of us view pulpit ministry in contemporary America. We celebrate the smooth and the polished. We measure the impact of a sermon not by whether hearts are slain by conviction but by how high the people jump when the preacher tells them what they want to hear.

That kind of carnal preaching may win the accolades of men, boost TV ratings and even build megachurches. But the kingdom

is not built on smug self-confidence. We need God's words. The church will live in spiritual famine until broken, reluctant, weak and trembling preachers allow His holy fire to come out of their mouths.

If you have a message from God, die to your fears, doubts and excuses, and drink the cup of suffering that accompanies the genuine call of God.

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