

False Prophet Making Wild Predictions for 2017

Lee Shing Chak is a “world-class fortuneteller who combines the ancient art of feng shui and the modern practice of statistics to divine what the future holds.” He wants us to know that he predicted the spread of Ebola, the death of Osama bin Laden, a nuclear crisis in Japan and the winner of the 2014 World Cup.

Now he is making predictions for us based on our birth year. If you were born in 1958 (like me), 1970, 1982, 1994 or 2006, yours is the “year of the dog.” (I’m not sure I appreciate the title.) He tells us 2017 will be “fairly busy for you, with little time to relax and unwind.” And he warns that we should prepare for a sudden illness or serious natural disaster.

Of course, so should everyone else.

The story goes on, but you get the idea. For each category, Mr. Lee predicts good fortune as well as challenges for which we should prepare. As with all such fortune-telling, his predictions are so ambiguous that their fulfillment depends not on him but on us.

According to the American Federation of Certified Psychics and Mediums (yes, this group really exists), 39 percent of men and 69 percent of women admit to having consulted a psychic. Fortune-telling is especially profitable during difficult economic times such as the recent recession. One man spent more than \$700,000 on a Manhattan psychic who promised to fix a romantic relationship.

Before you and I smugly conclude that we would never consult a fortune-teller, let me ask you: Have you ever made an appointment with a doctor in hopes of preventing disease? Have you ever asked a financial adviser to help you prepare for the

future? Do you check the weather forecast before heading out of the house each morning?

But there's a difference, you say, between trusting a psychic and consulting a doctor. Of course, you're right. I have worked in medical ethics for years and have the highest respect for health care professionals (as well as financial experts and meteorologists). But aren't these professions an attempt to predict the future—or at least prepare for it?

Why is that a bad thing? It's not—it's actually an excellent exercise in good stewardship. God wants us to manage our health, finances and safety as effectively as possible. The problem comes when we trust fellow mortals more than we depend on the divine Master.

Then we are in danger of the sin of presumption.

The reason our secular culture is so obsessed with preparing for the future is that so few trust the God of the future. We would do well to remember Jesus' parable of the "rich fool," to whom God said, "'This night your soul will be required of you. Then whose will those things be which you have provided?'" (Luke 12:20).

So, make your plans for the new year and the new day, then trust them to God's providence. Prepare for tomorrow, but prepare even more for eternity. And your peace "which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7b) will be a powerful witness to a fearful culture. {eoa}