

Are We Making Superheroes Out Of Modern Prophets?

Recently I attended a large meeting led by two of the most well known leaders in the current renewal movement. Good men! Make no mistake when I say that I respect them both and have nothing derogatory to say about them. I was troubled, however, at something I sensed in the meeting and had a hard time plugging in to the flow of the Spirit because of it. I kept thinking there must be something wrong with me. Only days later did I come to understand.

The explanation goes back to 1988 at the height of the prophetic movement and a meeting I attended in Seattle. Hundreds of pastors and leaders had gathered to hear a leading prophetic voice speak. In those days, unfortunately, few of us in renewal circles longed to hear a meaty and convicting prophetic message addressed to the whole body of Christ. The focus and prayer of almost everyone present was for the prophet on the platform to call them out of the crowd and speak an individual personal prophetic word over their lives. To my shame, I was among them.

Worship came to a close and we waited, but the prophet didn't show. Eventually the day's host came to the microphone to announce that the prophet would not be ministering. The reason? He could not cater to the self-centered hunger of the crowd to receive those personal words. The wrongness in the spirit of it blocked his ability to hear from God. In fact, we were told that it felt to him like white witchcraft. Over the years since then, I've seen and felt that same spirit many times in many settings where prophetic people ministered. Unfortunately, most of those prophetic people failed to discern what the honorable prophet in Seattle discerned and simply forged ahead. In the years that followed I saw lives destroyed as people acted on words that didn't truly come from God.

In the aftermath of John Wimber's ministry much of the renewal

movement understood the message that God didn't want the superstar on the platform to do it all for us, but that His heart was to give the ministry to the average believer. It was the solidly biblical idea that signs and wonders have been placed in the hands of the ordinary person through the Holy Spirit who fills us.

This was part of the wonder of the Toronto Blessing when I first encountered it in 1995. In the early days when I visited Toronto for the nightly renewal meetings the worship band wasn't particularly good and the substandard sound system made it worse. Most of the speakers bored me to tears while the general presentation from the platform broke all the rules of "the show". In spite of all this, God showed up and did amazing things. That's to say that it wasn't the presence of a greatly gifted spiritual hero on the platform making it all happen or doing it all for us. It could only be God and the ministry of an army of individual nameless and faceless nobodies praying for all those people standing in the prayer lines. Power fell and love flowed. I signed up for all of it I could get. To be fair to those who led it in those early days, I must say that the deficits I've cited have been remedied and the anointing continues on.

Over the last few years, however, I've sensed a disturbing trend, and this brings me back to what troubled me in that recent meeting I attended. I fear that the renewal wing of the body of Christ is reverting to the day when the focus fell in the wrong place. I fear that we increasingly gather in large meetings hoping and longing to see some kind of supernatural thing performed by the spiritual hero on the platform that will touch us personally. What I sensed in that recent meeting felt very much like the spirit of the meeting in 1988 when that honorable prophetic man of God refused to come to the platform because of the wrongness in the hearts of the congregation. I sense a subtle—and often not so subtle—turning once again to a form of hero worship that looks for the super-gifted one on the platform to give us an experience. In my personal opinion, having lived through the various spiritual renewal streams and movements since 1958 when I was seven years old and my parents received the baptism in the Spirit, I

think that the overall level of anointing has been proportionately diminished.

Shouldn't it just be about God? Why are we longing to be supernatural or have supernatural experiences when we should be simply longing to be intimate with the Father? Why have we begun once more to idolize men and women when at one time it was just the Presence of the living God? To quote from my book, *Visions of the Coming Days*, "If you focus on being supernatural you will end up in shipwreck, but if you focus on being intimate with the Father you will end up being supernatural." Our aim is off.

I confess that I find it difficult to attend conferences these days that I'm not speaking for. The atmosphere troubles me and I often feel as if I don't fit. Even when I'm the speaker, I want to crawl under a chair when certain kinds of adulation begin to come my way. I know where that leads. It robs the body of Christ of the true glory and it turns the focus away from the Lord and onto the man. This smacks of idolatry. I just want the Presence and I want it in any form He wishes to send it.

In what I'm saying, I don't see that the problem necessarily lies in the leaders I'm citing, although there are leaders out there who do feed on the kind of thing I'm addressing. The men and women I walk with and regard as my friends, well known leaders, may or may not see what I'm seeing, but I know their hearts are right. I'm saying that an attitude or mindset, a hunger, is taking root in believers that does not reflect the heart of God. It's a dangerous trend.

I was raised by people the world saw as spiritual heroes. I can therefore state with certainty that they are no different than you or me. They're just people, ordinary people, who have been given a message and the responsibility to deliver it. They're not amazing. They're not super-spiritual every minute of every day. They fight with their spouses. They have problems with their children. They get hurt when persecuted. They have personality problems, tempers, weaknesses and insecurities. Love them. Don't idolize them. Heroes have a way

of disappointing us and it's often not their fault.