

Back to the Pure Gospel

Recently I watched a vintage Billy Graham sermon from the 1950s that aired on television. I said to a friend who was with me that I rarely hear the gospel articulated today as clearly as we did by this amazing evangelist. A few days later, for my birthday, my friend sent me three recorded Graham sermons available on DVD.

One of the messages was from Graham's 1971 crusade at McCormick Place in Chicago. The shag haircuts, huge afros and polyester fabrics in the audience looked odd, and the music performed before the sermon was almost prehistoric. But when Graham held his Bible in the air and preached about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in that packed arena, nothing seemed outdated.

Listening to Graham stirred something deep inside me: A passion to be a herald of truth to my generation. My heart cries out for the American church to stop muddling, muffling, cheapening, distorting and merchandising the pure gospel. How we need to return to the simplicity of evangelism that cuts to the heart, produces repentance and reveals the Son of God!

For several months I've been asking the Lord to make me His trumpet.

In my quest He's shown me some of the qualities that shaped biblical

prophets into His mouthpieces. I pray all of us will adopt these same

characteristics:

1. Boldness. True prophets have steel backbones.

They do not cower when the majority disagrees with them. They are

possessed by God, and they must release the fire inside. Will you pray

for this boldness and say with Isaiah, "Here am I, send me" (Is. 6:8,

NASB)—even when you know you will be opposed?

2. Biblical integrity. Our movement has been

veering dangerously off course lately. Please don't jump on every

charismatic bandwagon that comes along. You might fall off the edge.

Some of what is passed off as prophecy today resembles the daily

horoscope. The prophetic movement has been tainted by silly fads and

charismatic witchcraft. Our warm and fuzzy fortunetelling can titillate

and thrill those with itching ears, but it is nothing more than pabulum

designed for babies who don't want to grow up. We need solid meat

without poisonous additives.

3. Compassion. Most people think Jeremiah was

angry and judgmental, but actually he wept when he confronted Israel's

sins. It is not enough to prophesy the Lord's word—we also must aim to speak with His tone of voice. We must be willing to intercede for and identify with those we confront.

4. Purity. God is not so much interested in the booming voice, the rousing delivery, the charisma or the technological savvy that we expect today from celebrity preachers. What matters most is pure content that flows through a pure vessel.

When Moses made the tabernacle, God told him to make silver trumpets that were “hammered work” (Num. 10:2). If we want to speak for Him, we must be willing to endure the shaping process. Prepare to be hammered!

5. Faithfulness. Jonah tried to flee as far as possible from Nineveh, but the God of the second chance used a strange vessel to get the prophet back on course. It involved a visit to a fish's stomach, where Jonah spent three days in darkness, stewing in digestive juices. When the fish vomited him on land, he was better prepared to speak heaven's words.

Like Jonah, the American church has been running from its evangelistic assignment. We charismatics get excited about prophecy, angels, healing, visions, dreams, gold dust and prosperity, but when it comes to winning souls we're not really interested. Like Jonah, we've

boarded a ship for Tarshish and gone to sleep—and we've put unbelievers in peril by our disobedience.

In my travels overseas, I find rapidly growing churches fueled by a radical exuberance for evangelism, discipleship, missions and helping the poor. Yet when I come home I see a church enamored with the latest spiritual sideshows.

The storms we endure today are designed to get us back on course.

Evangelism, pure and simple, is God's heart. We must repent of betraying the Lord. Let's keep the main thing the main thing.

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