

# The Power and the Pain of True Prophetic Preaching

*No true message from God will flow through a person who is smug and self-confident. If you want to speak for Him, prepare to die!*

I did it again. This past 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.

**"We measure the impact of a sermon not by whether hearts were slain by Holy Ghost conviction but by how loud the preacher shouted or how high the people jumped when the preacher told them what they wanted to hear."**

But even though I speak often, I've found that preaching the gospel is one of the most difficult, frightening and painful assignments anyone could possibly attempt. It is not fun. I feel as though 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 particularly 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 really discouraged after I speak," I told my friend. "Does that ever happen to you?" I was sure he would counsel me to stop preaching, since it obviously was not my spiritual gift.

His answer shocked me. "Son, I have felt like that every Monday morning since I've been in the ministry."

When I tell my friends that I never felt I was gifted to speak, and that I stubbornly resisted the call of God on my life because of my lack of confidence, they act surprised. Most of us assume that people who stand in pulpits want to be there.

Think again!

The power of prophetic preaching actually works in the opposite way we assume it should. If we view things carnally, we believe God chooses gifted orators who hone and shape their skills like a doctor who learns surgery or an actor who learns to perform on stage.

But true preaching is not a natural exercise—it is actually 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 it in the flesh, the results will be miserable; but if we wholly trust the power of the Spirit, prophetic preaching will unleash God to move however He desires.

If we fail in this process, we are humiliated. Why would anyone want to preach?

No wonder most of the leaders we encounter in the Bible were reluctant to speak. Moses made excuses about stuttering, Gideon tried to disqualify himself and Jeremiah complained to the Lord about the weighty 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 worldly 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 three 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, however, who loves to talk, loves to be public, and enjoys being seen and heard, need not think that a word like this will ever be emitted from his mouth. The man who sighs and groans when called upon to speak, who does not want to be there, who feels terribly uncomfortable, who knows that he is not going to be understood, 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 were slain by Holy Ghost conviction but by how loud the preacher shouted or how high the people jumped when the preacher told them what they wanted 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 this is your assignment, die to your fears, doubts and excuses and drink the cup of suffering that accompanies the genuine call of God.

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