

# PROPHETIC PREACHING

then and now

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### PROPHETIC PREACHING

**"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:19-21).**

**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19).**

The Lord JESUS CHRIST, the prophet of Galilee, is the divine pattern for all preachers. He was sent by the Heavenly Father to preach. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit to preach. Preaching was the chief method by which he implanted the truth of GOD into the minds and hearts of his believing followers. He lit his torch with fire from off the altar of Heaven, and took the light into a benighted, sin-darkened world. The flaming words of truth which he preached attracted the attention of the multitudes, for fire is easily noticed in the darkness.

The sacred eloquence of the young prophet of Galilee attracted **"great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan"** (Matthew 4:25). The multitudes flocked to hear him because he preached a sure word from GOD in Heaven to hungry-hearted men on earth. He preached eternal truth, the glad news of the Gospel.

Second only to JESUS, Moses was the tallest in the mountain range of the prophets, the most august character in antiquity. He brought vital messages directly from GOD to the people, messages about monotheistic theology, about morals, about social righteousness, about legal justice, about national policies and military strategy.

Moses' sermons in Deuteronomy form the text book from which so many prophets in the succeeding generations learned the rudiments of their mission and messages. This is especially true of the great prophets of the Eighth Century B.C.-Isaiah, Hosea, Amos and Micah. The Lord

JESUS knew the writings of Moses intimately, quoted his sayings frequently, adhered to his teachings loyally, and fulfilled his prophecies gloriously.

Moses had the grandeur of Isaiah, the vision of Ezekiel, the passion for righteousness of Amos, the tender love of Hosea, the intense patriotism of Jeremiah, and the erudite mind of the Apostle Paul.

**"And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face"** (Deuteronomy 34:10).

### **Clarion Call for Prophetic Preaching**

There is a current and constant call for prophetic pulpit preaching. People have a genuine heart-hunger for the meat of the Word and the bread of life. A. T. Robertson, far-famed teacher of New Testament a generation ago, had a quaint way of sadly bemoaning the fact that the "poor hungry sheep look up to the food rack, and are not fed. All they hear is the wind whistling through."

Preachers are divinely called to preach, to preach in power and demonstration of the Spirit. Too many sermons are bland, innocuous, soporific. They deal in vague abstractions, pleasing platitudes, psychological theories, and watered-down theology, instead of telling people how to get the righteousness of GOD in their hearts through CHRIST. The water of life should not be handed out in half-pint cups.

When a prominent or desirable church pastorate becomes vacant, usually there are scores and perhaps hundreds of recommendations or personal applications for the place. However, a pulpit committee often takes months upon months searching for a man whom the church desires for pastor. Why do they search so long? They are looking for a man of GOD with a message from GOD, a man whose heart is ablaze with spiritual zeal to lead men to GOD. A congregation will overlook some other deficiencies and even some faults in a pastor if only he is a good preacher, with GOD's message. They want assurance from GOD that they have received the gift of salvation personally. They see a decaying society, and they want to hear the causes exposed, the remedy explained. Most churches are ready to call a man who has a soul burden, a heart passion and a prophetic urgency.

### **What Is Prophetic Preaching?**

Prophetic preaching is preaching like the prophets.

Preaching was one of the most unique and distinguishing characteristics of worship during Old Testament times. Who can measure the influence of these holy men of old on their generations and throughout the centuries which have followed? **"Thus saith the Lord"** was their message, and preaching was their method of communicating it.

Preaching has been and still is pre-eminently vital to the spreading of the Christian faith. In order to build the Kingdom of Heaven, JESUS established the Gospel as the essential message, the church as the promotional agency, and preaching as the principal means of persuasion. The early Christian fathers knew that CHRIST would save men's souls and that his Gospel would save

society from ignominy, despair, and decay. They preached that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. They predicted a new Heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness would reign.

What is prophetic preaching? What is good preaching?

Good preaching is a sermon that is preached with a good delivery, but much more. It means a well-prepared message with food for thought which is organized in proper homiletical form, but much more. Lack of some of these qualities can be forgiven if the preacher's soul is burdened with a message from GOD to men, and if his soul is ablaze with zeal to deliver it. His heart must be "pregnant with celestial fire" (Gray's *Elegy*).

One can learn something about the meaning of the term "prophetic preaching" from the Old Testament word *nabhi*, translated **prophet**. Hebrew scholars say this word means a speaker, an announcer, a proclaimer, a herald. It is used nearly three hundred times in the Old Testament. A *nabhi*, a prophet of GOD, is a forth-teller. He is GOD's mouthpiece who delivers a message of GOD, when he is possessed with absolute certainty that it is divine truth coming directly from GOD, and when a Heaven-born compulsion to deliver the message is upon him. When the inspiration for preaching is from GOD, it will be delivered authoritatively and with urgency. One preaches prophetically when he is under authority like Amos:

**"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"** (Amos 3:7-8).

The preacher who merits being called a prophetic preacher must feel that he is under a spiritual compulsion like Paul when he said: **"Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me, if I preach not the gospel"** (I Corinthians 9:16).

Prophetic preaching is not something merely thought out, or inferred, or hoped, or feared. It is directly inspired by the Spirit of GOD, an inspiration which gives power to a preacher's sermon preparation through study, meditation and prayer.

Some people think prophetic preaching always means foretelling future events. Frequently GOD used current conditions and events to open a prophet's vision to foresee results in the future. This is only a part of the meaning of the term, and not necessarily the major part. Old Testament prophets were not like almanac makers, predicting dates and events. They were forth-tellers more frequently than foretellers. They were truth-tellers, message-bearers, mouthpieces for GOD. Prophetic preaching dealt with the past and the present as well as the future. The Old Testament prophets were interpreters of history's lessons about moral and spiritual issues. They were **"seers,"** men who knew the condition of their present world, in the light of which they praised or denounced or instructed people about their way of life. They had an understanding of the past and present when they "dipped into the future" to foretell the impending judgments of GOD.

The ideal is for a preacher to step forth like a herald with a personal message from the King of kings for each individual listener. It is said that once while Charles Haddon Spurgeon was preaching with impassioned earnestness a little girl in the vast audience asked with anxious

concern, "Mother, is Mr. Spurgeon speaking to me?" Prophetic preaching did not inspire the phrases "dull as a sermon" and "prosaic as a parson." Jeremiah said GOD asked the question: "**Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh a rock in pieces?**" (Jeremiah 23:29).

Prophetic preaching does not just happen. It does not come automatically with a seminary degree, nor with ordination to the ministry, nor with a call to a pastorate. It is not by intellectual might nor by ecstatic emotion, but by the Spirit of GOD when he lays hold upon a preacher to deliver a life-and-death message to men. Sometimes prophetic preaching is abrupt, often it is explosive, frequently it is disturbing, but always it is moving and purifying and refreshing. It will not return void, but will accomplish GOD's purpose in the lives of men and nations (Isaiah 55: 11).

The Gospel should be communicated boldly, fearlessly, simply, earnestly, lovingly, "as from a dying man to dying men." There is no power in vague generalities, nor irrelevant theories, nor that which creates doubt in the minds of the hearers. People have doubts and theories enough; they are hungry-hearted for the truth from Heaven. An ideal sermon is delivered in the language understood by the people, answers some problem of the people, and inspires a more godly life by the people. The poet beautifully describes the aims of a worthy preacher:

"Unskilled he to fawn, or seek for power  
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour:  
For other aims his heart had learned to prize,  
More bent to raise the wretched than to rise.

"And, as a bird each fond endearment tries  
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,  
He tried each art, reproved each dull delay,  
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way."

- Goldsmith, The Deserted Village

The content of prophetic preaching always is built around some profound doctrine which is pertinent to everyday life. Theology is the steel structure upon which every message is built. Not every preacher can preach a great sermon every time, but there is no excuse for preaching on a little and unimportant subject. There is no time for drivel when people are confused and frustrated and lost. May GOD deliver such people from clever entertainment, or mere reviewing current events, or "pink tea" dissertations on recent theories about psychology. Prophetic preaching is based on "**Thus saith the Lord.**"

The prophets used apt illustrations and graphic metaphors in order to fix spiritual truth in the minds of the hearers. A well-built sermon is like a well-built house. It has doctrinal structure like steel, able discussion like well built walls, and illuminating illustrations like clear windows. JESUS set the divine pattern in how to illustrate spiritual truths. Who could fail to understand what the Saviour was teaching when he gave such illustrations as that of the prodigal son, or the good Samaritan, or the rich farmer fool who died?

A number of the prophets even dramatized their illustrations in order to make them more effective.

- Jeremiah put a yoke about his neck while urging Judah to submit to Babylon (Jeremiah 27:2; 28:10).

- Ezekiel cut his hair and beard with a razor and divided it into three parts (Ezekiel 5:1-4). One part he burned, one part he smote with a knife, one part he scattered to the wind-illustrating how Judah would be treated.

- Isaiah walked the streets of Jerusalem barefooted and stripped of his outer garments, to declare dramatically how Assyria would lead the Egyptians as prisoners in shame (Isaiah 20:2-4).

It is entirely too frequent that people leave a preaching service, saying, "What in the world was the preacher driving at?" The people who hear Hosea or Jeremiah or John the Baptist most surely did not say that about the preaching they heard. The Old Testament prophets spoke in graphic language about things relevant to the daily living of their hearers, and made their sermons effective by pointed, personal application.

For example, John the Baptist not only denounced sin and demanded repentance, but he told exactly what sins the people were committing and exactly how they should act to prove that they were repentant.

### **Permanence and Power of Prophetic Preaching**

The throb of a true prophet's heart can be heard and felt throughout the ages to come. Truth can be hidden but it cannot be killed. Nothing can be an adequate substitute for prophetic preaching in advancing the Kingdom of GOD.

The printed page is a mighty instrument in propagating truth, but it cannot substitute for the flash of a speaker's eye, the sincerity in a prophet's voice, the pathos of a preacher's appeal, and a loving message which comes from the heart of a man of GOD. Pastoral ministries are useful and influential and quite necessary. Organization is effective and promotion can be dynamic. Sympathetic counseling is consoling and often vitally helpful. Rituals and ceremonies are pleasing and inspiring. But preaching, good preaching, God-inspired, Spirit-filled, and Christ-centered preaching, is GOD's supreme plan for building his kingdom.

**"It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe"** (I Corinthians 1:21).

Prophetic preaching has been an integral and vital part in every forward Christian movement or revival. Through the centuries GOD has touched the hearts of preachers with spiritual fire and made their tongues like spiritual flames. The ministry of Gospel preaching is the pinnacle of the vocations of men. One should accept a call of GOD to preach with profound thanksgiving, heart-felt humility, and an all-compelling sense of responsibility.

### **FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION**

1. How is the call of GOD to a preacher different from his call to a physician or teacher or

business man?

2. Tell about the call of GOD to Moses, to Isaiah, to Jeremiah, to Ezekiel, to Amos, to Jonah, to Matthew, to Paul. Tell about their different difficulties about responding. Are preachers called like that today?

3. Discuss the pastors in the city, or the pastors of your church during the past twenty years, as to which one is most like an Old Testament prophet. Which of the prophets does he seem to be most like?

4. Study the life of CHRIST to see what emphasis he placed on preaching (Matthew 5-7, 10, 13, 24-25).

5. Discuss the different styles of delivery by the Old Testament prophets. Which one was most statesmanlike? the most rhetorical? the most emotional? the most patriotic? the most visionary? the sternest? the tenderest? the most Christlike? the most poetic? the most practical? the most encouraging?

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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