

The VOICE of the Prophet

By J. Mark Jordan

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? Acts 7:52

They were Jehovah's remembrancers, God's blowtorches of the Old Testament. Rough, fearless, sometimes uncouth, they shouted the divine displeasure with Israel from the mountaintops. They spared nobody --kings, queens, princes, priests, --- and left no stone unturned in their quest for righteousness. The prophets rained on the effete parades. They were the bulls in the privileged classes' china closets, the worms in the polished apples, the cockroaches invading the laps of luxury. They crashed parties, tore down altars to false gods and pointed their fingers in the faces of Israel's evil leaders. They angered, affronted, cajoled and rebuked. They were rarely invited, often snubbed, mostly persecuted and sometimes slain. They took their orders from God alone. They were the screaming headlines of heaven's daily news.

Do we need prophets today? Absolutely! With the passing of the Old Covenant and the introduction of the New, God made sure that the role of the prophet was not lost. *"Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."* Ephesians 3:5. *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."* Ephesians 4:11. Now, we are more likely to call prophets preachers, and they have different roles, but the ministry of prophet to disturb and stir the waters is a part of preaching.

The prophet reminds us to put God first. The voice of Elijah, the Tishbite, was probably the strongest prophetic voice to rattle the cages of Israel's kings. During a famine, a widow woman was about to make her last meal for herself and her son, and then die. Elijah showed up. *"And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son."* 1 Kings 17:13. The prophet represented God to this woman. There is never a time that we should put selfish interests first. *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God."* Matthew 6:33.

The prophet trumpets the miraculous power of God. The same woman's son had died. If Elijah represented God in taking away, he reminded her that God also gives back. *"And*

he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. "1 Kings 17:21-22. The prophet can walk into your troubled life and calm the storm..

The prophet troubles our consciences. The vile King Ahab had let his wife, Jezebel, lead Israel into the worship of Baal. God sent Elijah to deliver a strong warning to him. *"And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"* 1 Kings 18:17. The voice of the prophet speaks loud and clear today. Anyone who breaks God's law destroys his own soul.

The prophet forces us into a decision. *"And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word."* 1 Kings 18:21. The prophet does not tolerate procrastination.

The prophet rebukes us for wrong doing. Ahab had stolen a vineyard from a good man named Naboth through treachery and murder. Before he had a chance to eat the first grape, Elijah walked into his life. *"And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD."* 1 Kings 21:20. We need someone who will point his or her finger in your face and say "You must repent." Who will do that for you?

But, God never lets the prophet's voice die. Remember Stephen? Preaching to the crowd that crucified Jesus, he said, *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One?"* Acts 7:52. His words cut to their hearts because their fathers had killed the prophets of long ago. Now, centuries later, they were guilty of the blood of Jesus. They didn't like the voice of the prophet back then; and they didn't like it now. The same spirit that had slain ancient prophets rose up stoned the prophet Stephen. *"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord. And they stoned Stephen."* Acts 7:57,59.

But God is not so easily vanquished. In the very act of murder, God commissioned another voice. *"And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."* Acts 7:58. The Apostle Paul became the new prophet. The blood of the martyr's became the seed of the church. The voice of the prophet will never die.

May we never censor the voices of the prophets among us. When we grow comfortable in our insular world, when the senses of our spiritual and moral conscience become dull, when we distance ourselves from the presence of God, when we grow tolerant of evil, may we always expect the voice of a prophet to jar our collective conscience. It is the voice that saves us from ourselves.