

Our journey into rediscovering Apostolic and Prophetic foundations (Part 2)

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In my last post, we painted in broad strokes a picture of a church that is missing key foundational pieces in its development. With this post, we want to start filling in some color: just what has the church been missing over the last two millennia?

Here are some gaping holes we see in today's church through the systemic neglect and/or rejection of **God's prophetic people gifts**.

- Without the prophetic voice, we have become overly pragmatic and mechanistic in our orientation towards effectiveness and success as a church. The goals are wrong, so the methods and metrics are too. Would we have embraced the church growth movement as readily as we have otherwise with its goal of "bigger = better"? Would we have as uncritically let business world practices, language and "job descriptions" encroach into church life and administration (e.g., "executive pastor")? Budgets, baptisms and butts in the seats — is that the best we can do metric-wise?
- Without prophetic witness, most Western Christians don't expect God to speak to us. His voice remains stuck on the pages of a book that only a professional can access and then spoon feed to us. The ways God speaks is through pastors, leaders and teachers who write Christian books. That's why we buy books on areas we're struggling in. We don't expect real time instruction and guidance from God and instead do what James tells us not to do: make plans without consulting God.
- Without prophetic imagination to show us the possibilities, we don't expect God to perform miracles in our midst and in our present era. The Kingdom now, dynamic aspect of the gospel as a living, breathing force has been lost as has the urgency of obeying and listening to God. So we settle for small goals of 10% church growth, more people in small groups next year, a bigger budget next year and more volunteers. Are we reading the same stories? Is anything too difficult for the Lord? Where is the prophetic unction that moves the church forward to continue where Acts 28 left off?
- Without prophetic urgency, we don't question status quo and are afraid to disturb social and traditional equilibrium — something that the prophetic consistently did to a stagnating people of God in the O.T.! And the longer we get away with something, the more settled in it becomes as a tradition or part of the very ethos of the church.
- Without the prophetic perspective, eschatological living (where past, present and future are held together) has also been lost — the kind that asks "what kind of people should we then be?" as Peter reminds us in his first letter. The future — as a meaningful concept and motivation — is relegated to a distant reality — not a present one. And we hence function primarily from the past rather than the future in how we live out the present — which pulls down the pace and the peaks of what can really happen. What happened to the eschatological perspective that the major and minor prophets gave us? The foundation they laid that opened up the church's supernatural imagination for future possibilities that are vastly different than now has been fading over the centuries.
- Without prophetic modeling, we lose our transformational and radical edge (think Hosea and Ezekiel). We don't seek to embody the message as first "fruits" of a people and a time yet to come and instead, like the O.T. people of God, we blend in too much with the world and live under the Kingdom of mammon or Babylon — not Jesus' Kingdom. Like the people of God in Scripture frequently did, we've got two feet in two Kingdoms and don't even know it. We don't even know how to live in one as we lack examples of translation in our culture and times. Prophetic people are the forerunners of this.

- Without prophetic spirituality, our spirituality becomes intellectual, predictable and segmented. We don't embrace mystery and the mysterious aspects of spirituality and of communal life. Faith takes on less and less risk and more and more intellectual assent in pursuit of "certainty" and orthodoxy. Thus, faith in the body of Christ atrophies away into the realm of ideas.
- And perhaps the greatest travesty, without prophetic longing, we are content with God being a distant Saviour and Creator who worked for us in the past and whom we will meet some day. But the relational metaphors of friend, brother, Father, and husband of the church that beckon us towards intimacy are never heard, wanted or deemed possible. Spirituality becomes about right belief or even right practice — not right relationship.

Are not some of these SO FOUNDATIONAL to what it means to walk with Jesus? We need them DESPERATELY. The body is not whole or healthy without them; it wasn't in the times when both the O.T. and N.T. were written either. And so maybe now we can see with greater urgency and clarity why Paul may have called prophets "foundation layers" alongside the apostles.