

## "Prophet And Loss"

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### Introduction

A rabbi, a priest, and a UCC minister

A rabbi, a priest, and a UCC minister were having a deep theological discussion. The rabbi said, "Ya know, I get my theological authority from the Torah!" The priest said, "Ya know, I get my theological authority from the pope!" And the UCC minister said, "Ya know, I was thinking..." I like that.

### John Calvin and Martin Luther

John Calvin and Martin Luther and others 500 years ago or so made it possible for Protestants to think for themselves! What does that mean exactly? Well, it means you don't have to blindly follow a pope, a potentate, or a president: You can think for yourself! It means you don't have to slavishly believe every single word in a book, even a sacred book, especially if there are hateful words in that sacred book: You can think for yourself! And it means you don't have to rely solely on the spiritual experiences of other people, you can have your own spiritual experiences: You can think for yourself! Many Protestants believe in, "the priesthood of all believers" and "the prophethood of all believers." In other words, we are all priests and we are all prophets. When I was in seminary, they told us that we are Christ's representatives on earth. And you all are Christ's representatives on earth. Or God's representatives on earth, for those who prefer that. What does it mean to be Christ's or God's representatives on earth? Well, it means to share the love of God. It means to follow the teachings of Jesus. And it means to listen for the Holy Spirit. That's what it means to be Christ's or God's representatives on earth. And that's also part of what it means to be a prophet.

### A Biblical Example

Jesus was a prophet

Jesus was a prophet and that was a dangerous business. According to the Gospel of Luke, some Pharisees came to warn Jesus. They told him that Herod wanted him dead. Jesus said: you go tell that fox that I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing, casting out demons and performing cures; then I'll head back to Jerusalem, because prophets can't be killed outside of Jerusalem. Then Jesus said: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets. And then Jesus said: you won't see me again until you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

The life of a prophet is sometimes short

The life of a prophet is sometimes short. Jesus knew that. As Jesus said: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets. But it's not just Jerusalem that kills the prophets. Abraham Lincoln was killed in Washington, DC. President Kennedy was killed in Dallas. And Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in Memphis. But why would anyone want to kill the prophets? Well, because they say things like, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Because they say things like, "Four score and seven years ago our [Founders] brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all [people] are created equal." And because they say things like, "ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." Also because they say things like, "I have a dream...that one day...little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers." Prophets are often killed for expressing sentiments like all of those.

## Another Biblical Example

But prophets also reap great rewards

But prophets also reap great rewards. According to Psalm 27, I believe we see a description of the great rewards that a prophet reaps. What are those great rewards? Well, I believe that one great reward that a prophet will reap will be: to live in the house of the Lord forever. I believe that another great reward that a prophet will reap will be: to behold the beauty of the Lord. And I believe that still another great reward that a prophet will reap will be: to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

What is a prophet?

What is a prophet? Well, a prophet shares the love of God. A prophet follows the teachings of Jesus. And a prophet listens for the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to share the love of God? Well, it means to proclaim that all people are children of God. It means to proclaim that all people are created in the image of God. And it means to proclaim that all people know are blessed by God. What does it mean to follow the teachings of Jesus? Well, it means that you love your neighbors as yourself. It means that you love your enemies as yourself. And it means that you love yourself. And what does it mean to listen for the Holy Spirit? Well, it means that you are constantly alert for messages from the Holy Spirit: in yourself, in others, and in the world around you. It means that you are open: to new ideas, to new experiences, and to new people. And it means that your senses are greater than they used to be: you see things that you never noticed before, you hear things that you tuned out before, and you feel things that you ignored before. Oh, and one other thing about a prophet. A prophet is sometimes called the devil.

## Still Another Biblical Example

Jesus was called the devil

Jesus was called the devil! According to the Gospel of Mark, the scribes accused Jesus of being able to cast out demons because he himself was the devil. How did Jesus respond? Well, Jesus said to them: how can Satan cast out Satan? Jesus said to them: a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. And Jesus said to them: a house divided against itself cannot stand. Why would the Scribes and the Pharisees – the Religious Right of his day – call Jesus the devil? Well, I believe it's because he changed hateful scripture into loving statements. I believe it's because he fed the 5,000. And I believe it's because he welcomed everyone.

Jesus also spoke truth to power

Jesus also spoke truth to power. And power doesn't want to hear the truth. What are some examples? Well, power doesn't want to hear that a war it started was wrong. Power doesn't want to hear that a war it started was based on lies. And power doesn't want to hear that those who opposed the war were right. Also, power doesn't want to hear that climate change is real. Power doesn't want to hear that, because of climate change, the polar ice caps are melting. And power doesn't want to hear that climate change could be reduced by new regulations on businesses and manufactured goods. Plus, power doesn't want to hear that the economy is much better off today than it was seven years ago. Power doesn't want to hear that the stock market is much better off today than it was seven years ago. And power doesn't want to hear that the unemployment rate is much lower today than it was seven years ago. That's why power often only watches one particular news channel, which shields power from the truth spoken of by the prophets.

## A Modern-Day Example

Your pastor is a prophet

Your pastor is a prophet. That's what someone from the United Church of Christ national office told our office. Apparently the UCC is calling all of its churches – all 5000 of them – to thank them for doing what they do. The person who thanked us said: I looked at your website and your pastor is a prophet. What?

Am I a prophet?

Am I a prophet? It seems egotistical for me to even ask such a question. I mean, come on. Me, a prophet? Well, I do share the love of God. I do follow the teachings of Jesus. And I do listen for the Holy Spirit. But, come on. Me, a prophet? Well, I do speak truth to power. I do speak out against war built on lies. I do speak out about the reality of climate change. And I do speak out that the economy is much better off today than it was seven years ago. But, come on. Me, a prophet? Well, I have changed hateful scripture into loving statements. I do welcome everyone. And while I've never fed the 5000, I and others did feed 140 people on Thanksgiving and 90 people on Christmas. And hey, come to think of it, just like Jesus, people have called me the devil! My picture was plastered on a bulletin board in the neighborhood, with words that said something like: Rev. Freeman is the devil because he houses the homeless! I've heard that a congregation that used to rent from us tells people around town that I'm the devil and that this is an evil church! And now apparently a new congregation in town is telling members of this congregation that I am the devil and inviting them to come and join their church. I hope if they contact you, that you'll laugh and say: "Yes, Rev. Freeman is the devil, just like Jesus was! He changes hateful scripture into loving statements. He feeds hungry people. And he welcomes everyone." And if that makes me the devil, then I'll wear that like a badge of honor.

Conclusion

A Dr Pepper commercial

A Dr Pepper commercial from years ago, believe it or not, ties in to today's sermon. The commercial featured a jingle sung by David Naughton, who went on to become a famous actor. David Naughton danced and sang, "I'm a Pepper. He's a Pepper. She's a Pepper. We're a Pepper. Wouldn't you like to be a Pepper too?" I'm going to change that jingle just a little bit to fit today's sermon. (But don't worry. I'm not going to dance and sing it.)

I'm a prophet

I'm a prophet. He's a prophet. She a prophet. We're a prophet. Wouldn't you like to be a prophet too? You can be a prophet. How's that possible? Well, you can be a prophet because you are a child of God. You can be a prophet because you are created in the image of God. And you can be a prophet because you are blessed by God. Also, you can be a prophet because you can share the love of God. You can be a prophet because you can follow the teachings of Jesus. And you can be a prophet because you can listen for the Holy Spirit. Plus, you can be a prophet because you can change hateful scripture into loving statements. You can be a prophet because you can feed hungry people. And you can be a prophet because you can welcome everyone. In addition, you can be a prophet because you can speak truth to power. But let me warn you: It's not easy being a prophet. It can even be dangerous, as Jesus, Lincoln, Kennedy, and King know. But when you are a prophet, I believe you will reap a great reward. Your great reward will come, I believe, as the Psalmist says, when you, "see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

Closing Prayer

Let us pray...

God of Love,  
Help us to be a prophet.  
Help us to speak truth to power.  
And help us to laugh if people call us the devil,  
because that's also what they called Jesus.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.