

A Thundering Prophet And A Prostituted Religious System

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.” (John 1:6) Very early in his life John left the city of Jerusalem for the Judean wilderness. It was a very barren area. It wasn't unusual for the temperature to reach one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirty degrees in the summertime with very little shade. It was a good place for snakes and scorpions- not a good place for civilization. He was preaching in the wilderness. The diet he consumed- locusts and wild honey- were central to his message. The way he dressed- coarse camel's hair with a leather belt- emphasized the theme he proclaimed. John was a protester. He was protesting the Pharisees and what was happening in the temple in Jerusalem. John was a thundering prophet against a prostituted religious system. Where are the John the Baptist's today?

Luke 6 is the parallel passage to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Luke 6:24-26 lists four characteristics of those who reject Jesus.....

First, they live for money. Jesus said, “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.”

Second, they focus on self-satisfaction. “Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger.”

Third, their goal is entertainment. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.”

Fourth, they desire popularity. “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.”

Unfortunately, these four characteristics define much of contemporary Christendom.

Why must the church always ape the culture? If the culture has a heavy metal movement the church will quickly follow. If rap music is popular in the teen culture it will quickly find its way into the church. If the masses demand bread and circuses, give it to them!

In the past men like Noah and Elijah and Jeremiah stood against the culture. Today, self proclaimed spiritual leaders embrace the culture. An entertainment obsessed culture has produced an entertainment obsessed church. Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23) Our model is slightly different. We desire to entertain people into the kingdom of God.

How does God define success in ministry? Paul wrote 2 Timothy from a dungeon. Condemned by Nero, he awaited death. The last chapter written by Paul was 2 Timothy 4. Paul was handing the baton of leadership to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 4:1-2 Paul said, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom....” Paul said, “Live your life for an audience of one. You will give an account before the Person of Jesus.” He continued, “Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” The task of the spiritual leader is to teach the Bible. Romans 10:17 says, “For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Success is not measured in terms of popularity or numbers. Success is measured by faithfulness to the

Word of God. The prophet Samuel taught the Word, paved the way for David and built an empire. Ezra taught the Old Testament and rebuilt a people. Peter proclaimed the truth, was crucified upside down and changed the world. Teach the Word!

In 1985 Robert Bellah wrote the landmark book entitled Habits of the Heart. He was asked if the church in America might inspire a broad based spiritual awakening. His reply? “No. The church in America is too secular.” Is it any wonder Jesus said, “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)

This year my two oldest sons entered first grade and kindergarten. In searching for the right school my wife and I desired a place filled with learning, study, discipline, work and order. In this global economy, a strong education is mandatory. Isn't a strong church that proclaims a high view of God even more important than a good education? The stakes are too high for us to simply imitate a culture reeling in confusion.

A recent study of ten thousand young people found that over fifty percent desired to worship in a place “with interesting preaching that tackles key issues.” Only twenty percent desired a church filled with entertainment and high tech multimedia. Yogi Berra said, “The more things change the more they stay the same.” The paradox is that in John 1 tens of thousands of people bypassed the comfortable temple in Jerusalem and went down into the wilderness. The Jericho Road was a dangerous road. Mount Moriah in Jerusalem is twenty-seven hundred feet above sea level. John was baptizing a thousand feet below sea level. It was a twenty-five mile journey straight down. What a sled ride for a kid! There were no McDonald's and no Best Western's. Thieves hid along the route. It was a dangerous journey. Yet, the hearts of the people were hungry to hear a thundering prophet. People searching for truth and not gimmicks. People looking for reality and not nonsense. Spiritual leaders, lift up your heads because those people exist today! Your task is to care for them and feed them the truth of God's Word and to love them. Be faithful.

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