

THE PROPHETIC OFFICE AS PARADIGM FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY

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In The Netherlands, most villages are graced with churches, with one dominating the center of town. Towering over neighboring buildings, many of their spires suggest a religious presence. But the sad reality is that many have become empty shells. They are cavernous monuments of another era, when the church was the center of life and God's Word was declared from its pulpits. Today, many of these hollowed-out edifices have been converted into everything from carpet warehouses to discotheques. One can only lament the lost voice, one that called people back to God.

That voice is absent in most of Western Europe. To a lesser extent, this is also true in the United States. It is rare to find a platform where a passionate voice declares, "Thus saith the Lord." There are plenty of pulpits, but few preachers are up to filling them. As a result, our vacuous faith is robbing the postmodern world of what it needs most, a word from God.¹

I. THE NEED FOR PROPHETIC MINISTRY

My argument in this article is that pastors must once again engage in a prophetic role. The times require that they stand and speak with divine authority, with a passion and a conviction that God has revealed his will to them. This is not to suggest that the Canon is still open, nor that every word preached from the pulpit should be viewed as divinely inspired. But it is to say that God remains committed to revealing himself through faithful preaching. Few congregations are leaving Sunday morning services with the impression that divine revelation has taken place.

Much of today's preaching seems calibrated to attract the hearers, satisfy the attendees, and avoid offence. It is delivered with the assumption that people want comfort rather than confrontation. This is, in part, a result of the direction pastoral theology has taken in recent years. It is also a consequence of ministry reoriented towards the unchurched, with a view to satisfying the consumer. In

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¹David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 2.

the process, sentiment is growing that preaching has been hijacked by another language. We're in danger of losing our mother tongue. Psychology has commandeered theology; psychobabble has replaced repentance; motivational talks have shoved aside exegesis; and theology proper has been overtaken by therapy.² It is time to get back to our prophetic mission, lest we wind up in the junkyard of irrelevancy.

The concern is expressed on numerous fronts. Homiletician Calvin Miller mourns over the loss of prophetic ministry. Assessing contemporary preachers, he writes, "There is often little of Jeremiah in their message. The thorny personal requirements of Amos or John the Baptist have been traded for a velvet togetherness."³ The "soup" is so bland that no one is offended by the taste. Bill Hull, author and pastor, agrees. A prophet-less ministry has rendered the church tepid, imprisoned by structures and red tape, and derelict in the making of disciples. Inspired by the prophet Amos, he writes,

We think ourselves safe from God's discipline because we are theologically orthodox and we are the church, not Israel. We reason that this is God's age of grace. He doesn't hammer His people anymore. However, I firmly believe the Lion has roared against the evangelical church.⁴

The need, then, is for pastors to take the mantle of Elijah, so to speak, and fulfill their ministry.

II. THE RATIONALE FOR PROPHETIC MINISTRY

There may be a need for prophetic ministry, but is this a f expectation of contemporary pastors? Is this a distinctive of another dispensation, or should we still insist that pastors be prophetic? After all, NT pastors are not synonymous with OT prophets. Eph 4:11, as one example, distinguishes prophets from pastors, suggesting that they each have their functions. OT prophets, in the main, had a singular task—to be mouthpieces for God. Pastors, by the very nature of the term, have a much broader ministry. Many of the OT and NT prophets carried out a predictive role, one that would seem to have ceased with the completion of the Canon. Furthermore, the word of God came with an immediacy and directness that, for the most part, does not come to pastors today. Prophets who received infallible and canonical prophecies provided a foundation for the church (Eph. 2:20), one that should not be tampered with, added to, or subtracted from.⁵ Those of another era manifested miraculous, if not remarkable, demonstrations of power.

²Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 105.

³Calvin Miller, *Walking with Saints* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 164-65.

⁴Bill Hull, *Can We Save the Evangelical Church?* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993), 10.

⁵John Stott, *The Gospel and the End of Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 27. See also his discussion in *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity,

Nonetheless, there are good reasons for calling pastors to be prophetic. The prophetic informs the pastoral, and here is why.

A. *The Nature of God*

Behind any prophetic ministry is a passionate God, jealous for his name. It is God's commitment to justice, his hatred of abuse, his grief over sin, and his passion for his people that has inspired a prophetic word. Divine fervor and prophetic ministry are woven together, from Genesis to Revelation, from Abraham (Gen 20:7) to John (Rev 1:1).⁶ And God has not changed (Jas 1:17). He still hates the sins of his people and uses all kinds of inward and outward griefs to wean their hearts from disobedience.⁷ He is still speaking to his world. Where one hears his voice, it is evident he remains committed to repentance and renewal. Through the instrument of a pastor, the blend of the pastoral and the prophetic becomes a powerful tool in the hand of God.

B. *The Nature of a Pastor*

In a previous article, I suggested that the roots of pastoral identity could be traced back to each of the OT offices.⁸ These spiritual offices—prophet, priest, sage, and king—were established by God to lead his people. Each served a defined role, and each expressed a particular dimension of ministry. They also coalesced in the person of Christ. It follows, then, that pastors who seek to emulate Christ will have a prophetic component to their ministry. Christ was, after all, the prophet par excellence, the prophet predicted by Moses (Luke 2:47; Acts 3:22-24).⁹ His messages were marked by "Thus saith the Lord." Completing his ministry on earth, he left this mandate for those who lead the church: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Being prophetic is not optional, but an important feature of the pastor's role, identity, and Christlikeness.¹⁰

1979), 161ff. Stott describes the present prophetic role of the pastor as a "subsidiary gift of some kind," but one that is not easily defined (p. 162).

⁶Daniel L. Migliore, "The Passion of God and the Prophetic Task of Pastoral Ministry," in *The Pastor as Prophet* (ed. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald H. Sunderland; New York: Pilgrim, 1985), 123.

⁷J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 71.

⁸John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices As Paradigm For Pastoral Identity," *BibSac* 152 (April-June 1995): 182-200.

⁹Stanley M. Hauerwas, "The Pastor as Prophet: Ethical Reflections on an Improbable Mission," in *The Pastor as Prophet*, 38. Moses was the great prophet of the OT, but Christ was even greater (Deut 18:15; Matt 11:9; 16:13-14; Mark 6:15; Luke 4:18-21; 7:16; 13:33; John 4:19; 6:14; 18:37; Acts 3:22).

¹⁰Ronald H. Sunderland and Earl E. Shelp, "Prophetic Ministry: An Introduction," in *The Pastor as Prophet*, 8.

C. *The Nature of the Church*

Pentecost inaugurated a new age, a new relationship with God, a new involvement with the Holy Spirit. What had been the experience of a few became the universal experience of the church. Joel's words were fulfilled, words which declared that the universal gift of the Spirit also became a universal ministry of prophecy (Acts 2:17).¹¹ All who live under the new covenant are prophets, in the broadest sense of the term. Peter's words turned upside down the assumption that prophecy had passed with the last of the writing prophets. This is not to suggest that NT prophets (e.g., Agabus, Silas), or those in the church with the gift of prophecy, or pastors who preach prophetically have an authority equal to that of an Isaiah. It is simply to underscore that God making himself known remains a viable expectation in ministry. The church is his prophetic community, commissioned to continue the task of exposing oppression, revealing truth, mocking the idols, and calling for decision.

D. *The Nature of the Pastoral Task*

If Pentecost initiated a prophetic age, then it would logically follow that a prophetic task is particularly incumbent upon pastors.¹² Pastors stand within the community, appointed to an office which has, as its chief duty, the proclamation of God's Word. Theirs is a calling, an ordaining to the task of rightly dividing the Word. It is their mission to preach in season and out (2 Tim 2:15; 4:2). God has commanded that those gifted in speaking should speak the words of God (1 Pet 4:11).

If pastoral preaching, then, is true to Scripture it will be the means by which God brings his Word to those who hear.¹³ It will be the fulfilling of their prophetic task. As J. I. Packer notes, "Prophecy has been and remains a reality whenever and wherever Bible truth is genuinely preached."¹⁴ It may be a fresh understanding of what has formerly been revealed, as opposed to new revelation, but this does not diminish its authority. It may need to be examined in the same manner Paul commanded us to examine prophetic utterances (1 Thess 5:20-21), but, passing the test, it needs to be received as God's will for our lives.

¹¹John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 74. See D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 154.

¹²Sunderland and Shelp, "Prophetic Ministry," 26. Looking at the OT office and the present pastoral role, they conclude that "the prophetic has been and continues to be a key aspect of the ministry of God's people." In a later article in the book, Hauerwas adds, "It is not a question of pastor or prophet, but how one pastors" ("The Pastor as Prophet," 44).

¹³Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 120.

¹⁴J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan: Revell, 1984), 217.

Contemporary pastors may not view themselves as prophets, but many of their predecessors did. There was a time pastors saw themselves as heirs of the Hebrew prophetic tradition. Like OT prophets, they understood their mission as proclamation of the Word of God. It was not their word; it was God's Word.¹⁵ Anything less would have been a disastrous loss for the church, preaching devoid of authority.¹⁶ In the early 1900s, one pastor wrote, "The only assurance of the reality of mission of God in ministry, the one secret and source of all spiritual vitality, power, and efficacy in ministry is 'prophetic succession.'"¹⁷

Today's pastors need to reclaim the same conviction—that God has a particular word for a particular time and a particular place.¹⁸ It may not be heard in the wind, or found in the midst of a heavenly vision, but it will emerge within the interplay of skillful exegesis, spiritual contemplation, and reflection on culture. If we are not convinced that it will, then much of what we do in the study will be an exercise in mental gymnastics, a mere piecing together of grammar, history, and theological study. But if we are persuaded that God is longing to reveal his will to those who wait for him, then the message preached will once again ring with the authority of an Isaiah, the heartbeat of a Jeremiah, and the passion of an Amos. Rather than the mere communication of ideas, it will have an impact like a light in a dark room, making clear the road ahead.¹⁹

III. THE NATURE OF PROPHETIC MINISTRY

If one is convinced that a pastor should be prophetic, that the OT office serves as a paradigm for his identity, what does it look like? What is a prophetic role? Is a pastor's trademark to be one long jeremiad? Does it mean one becomes a humorless denouncer, condoling the downtrodden, and condemning the oppressors (preferably in a very loud voice)? Does it suggest that God wants us to be a group of "fusty finger waggors" akin to those in the past who were "weird and confusing and all sounding alike"?²⁰ In other

¹⁵Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1:42.

¹⁶Cf. James D. Smart, *The Rebirth of Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 56.

¹⁷Charles D. Williams, *Prophetic Ministry for Today* (New York: MacMillan, 1921), 26. Speaking of this succession, David Hill writes, "It is those who have grasped the meaning of Scripture, perceived its powerful relevance to the life of the individual, the church and society, and declare that message fearlessly who are the true successors of OT and NT prophets" (*New Testament Prophecy* [Atlanta: Knox, 1975], 213).

¹⁸Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 16.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 42. In a later volume, Old gives an account of Italian preacher Girolamo Savonarola, who preached through the prophecies of Amos with such insight that many of his contemporaries recognized that he had exercised the prophetic ministry among them.

²⁰Philip Yancey, "The Bible's 'Fusty Old Men,'" *Christianity Today* (2 October 1987): 17.

words, is this a summons to become irrelevant, to alienate those . . . are attempting to reach? After all, tastes, composition, and economic conditions are shifting like plates along the San Andreas fault, and those insensitive to the present needs will, as one popular pastor puts it, fall through the cracks.²¹ Can we be prophetic and still reach our world?

Answers can best be found by examining the prophetic office. Here, three characteristics emerge. If pastors are faithful to its paradigm, they may find themselves reviving moments in the past, when people (churched and unchurched) arrived early for the best seats, convinced they might hear from God. Such ministry might actually be a breath of fresh air, blowing out a rather stale culture. Pastors will fill the vacuum, be what the church yearns for, and bring back an age that is, at present, perilously close to the edge of divine judgment.

A. Prophetic Preparation

By preparation, we mean this—*God's prophets wait for a word from God*. This is part of the first characteristic of a prophet. OT prophets were not central to the narrative. God's Word was the story. They came with a word from him. Inherent in the term *nabi*, the Hebrew word for prophet, is a "bubbling or boiling forth."²² God authorized his messengers to pour forth the word. They were, as Delitzsch puts it, the "proclaimers, publishers, speakers, namely, of God and His secrets."²³ Hence, "Thus saith the Lord" was their defining introduction (Jer 2:2; Ezek 2:4; Amos 1:3). They were charged with a burden, a word from the Lord that they had no choice but to deliver. At times, the message was eschatological in nature. But more often, prophets were preachers rather than predictors, forth-tellers rather than foretellers.

Consequently, they stood in God's council and listened for God's voice (Jer 23:22). They were given access to privileged information, called to submit to God, consume his word, and speak it (Ezek 3:1). Nearly every prophetic book introduces itself as the word, the vision, or the oracle given to the prophet. The prophets' qualifications had nothing to do with pedigrees, but everything to do with listening hearts (Amos 1:1). As Elizabeth Achtemeier observes,

According to Isaiah 6, Isaiah 40, and especially Jeremiah 23:18, the true prophet has stood in the heavenly council of the Lord to

²¹John C. Ortberg, "Denominations and Dinosaurs," *Books & Culture* 4 (July-August 1998): 14.

²²Robert D. Culver, "*nabi*," *TWOT* 2:544-45. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet* (Louisville: Westminster, 1995), 124.

²³F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 7:33.

perceive and to hear his word, and is then sent forth to proclaim the word that God will act among his people.²⁴

Apart from this, they had nothing to say and little to contribute to the setting. Words based in their imaginations would only lead the people into futility (Jer 23:16).

It should be no different today. The minister who engages in a prophetic ministry must be as unoriginal as the prophets of old. What is preached should not derive from one's own inventive musings, but be inspired by God's revelation. A preacher's initial task, then, is to wait upon God. In the midst of his interaction with the written revelation, there must be the expectation that God's purpose will be communicated. While in the study he should be like the prophet Habakkuk, who stationed himself on the rampart to keep watch and see what God would speak (Hab 2:1). The church needs pastors who enter with such expectations, prophetic hearts like Samuel, who will say, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:10). As Charles Jefferson puts it, "Like a Moses, he must go up to the mountain and talk with God face to face, coming down and giving to his brethren his latest revelation."²⁵ Unless this happens, he is not ready to enter the pulpit. With similar passion, MacArthur gives this exhortation to those who would hear their pastor: "Command him not to come back until he's read and reread, written and rewritten, until he can stand up, worn and forlorn, and say, 'Thus saith the Lord.'"²⁶

How does this happen? What does the OT prophet teach us? First of all, a contemporary prophet makes himself available. He determines to be still. In the solitude, he determines to tap into the source. He enters into covenant, a holy commitment to be God's mouthpiece, a mediator sent from God to speak in the name of God. He exposes himself to spiritual realities others might not see. This is the fruit of searching deeply into the Scriptures and entering the quiet where deep calls to deep (Ps 42:7). And then, like Isaiah, he declares, "Send me" (Isa 6:8).

Second, he must rid his life of impurities hindering the hearing of God's voice. The best exegesis, the finest theological analysis, and a mastery of the defined theme cannot compensate for a heart that is not right. Where there is sin, there is broken fellowship and divine silence. To whom did God reveal his Word? Williams answers:

He was the man who had so sensitized his conscience and purified his heart and attuned his spirit to the Spirit of God that he was worthy to be admitted into the Divine intimacy and

²⁴Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Preaching the Prophets With Honor," *Leadership Journal* 18 (Fall 1997): 59.

²⁵Charles Edward Jefferson, *The Minister as Prophet* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1905), 4.

²⁶John MacArthur Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Waco: Word, 1992), 348.

companionship, and so became a fit messenger and interpreter, an open and transparent medium between God and man.²⁷

Hence, he offers this challenge:

If we shall thus sensitize our consciences, purify our hearts and attune our minds to the mind of Christ, He will admit us into His fellowship and friendship. He will make us His intimates and confidants. He will whisper into our ears, through our own spiritual experience, messages for His people.²⁸

With the psalmist, such a prophetic pastor will declare, "He is intimate with the upright" (cf. Ps 25:14).

Third, God's contemporary prophet must come without distraction. Like Elijah, he separates himself from the preoccupations of this world and enters the desert to hear. Walter Brueggemann summarizes the point well:

The unleashing of the power for life in this world bent on death depends on pastoral work that is rigorous and prophetic work that is passionate. But such pastoral-prophetic work requires being fed by ravens, not at the king's table.²⁹

Distancing himself from occasional pleasures that compromise the hearing of God's voice, a pastor must wait before God for the Word that he wills to be spoken. Like Isaiah, he must listen, declaring, "He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious" (Isa 50:4-5).

God's Word must come on God's terms, so that, with Jesus, a pastor might say, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me" (John 7:16). Like Paul to the Corinthians, he declares that "in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God" (2 Cor 2:17). After all, a prophetic pastor's people do not come because of him. They are there because they come to hear a word from God. As Stowell notes,

The ultimate purpose of our preaching is not to develop a relationship between the parishioner and the preacher, but to facilitate a deepening relationship between the parishioner and his Lord.³⁰

It is in this task of waiting, then, that we become conduits, not celebrities. When we are marginal to his story, his Word, we are

²⁷Williams, *Prophetic Ministry for Today*, 24.

²⁸Ibid., 25.

²⁹Walter Brueggemann, "The Pastor as a Destabilizing Presence," in *The Pastor as Prophet*, 77.

³⁰Joseph M. Stowell, *Shepherding the Church into the 21st Century* (Wheaton: Victor, 1994), 216.

keeping our definitions right. Preaching becomes truth communicated through personality. Our problem, as William Willimon observes, is this: "We have got the personality thing down fairly well. It's the truth thing that may be in peril."³¹ We serve God when people are captivated by God's Word and not by the preacher. That's part of the prophetic role. If we do not take heed, we are less like Moses from the mountain and more like Aaron in the desert, shaping a representation of truth the people can relate to and control.

Speaking God's Word has the potential of unleashing inestimable power. Our tendency is to take it lightly, but God's revelation is powerful and majestic, capable of breaking the cedars and stripping a forest bare, able to strike like lightning, and able to shake the desert (Ps 29:3-11). Speaking of God's ability to confront enemies and create the world, Job attributed such awesome display to his whisper (Job 26:13-14). Imagine what would happen when he speaks with boldness! This is the power available to the prophet who speaks a divine word. One may command certain oratorical skills, but it is the power from 'within that will persuade lives. The power of the OT prophet's message was in its source, in its truth, and not in the charisma of the speaker.³²

God's power extended beyond the prophets' words, to their very being. When they experienced special anointings of God's Spirit (Num 11:25-29; Isa 42:1; 59:21), the ancient prophets were turned into other men (1 Sam 10:6). Moses was an inarticulate stammerer by nature, and Jeremiah complained that he was a novice. But these "ordinary men" received their courage, stamina, authority, and courage to enact their ministry by a divine empowerment, endowments of exceptional skill and giftedness (e.g., Isa 61:1; Jer 1:8-10). Recognizing the power that accompanied Elijah's prophetic ministry, Elisha requested a double portion for himself (2 Kgs 2:9). Filled with the Spirit, Ezekiel was set upon his feet (Ezek 2:2). Empowered from on high, Jeremiah likened himself to a fortress, an "iron pillar" (Jer 1:18). Micah directly declared, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord" (Mic 3:8). Without such divine enablement, prophets were vulnerable, their words were lifeless, and their ministries were futile. Jonah stands as a warning of ministry weakened and shipwrecked when disobedience takes hold.

The same Spirit is still empowering today. Pastors need to wait upon God, not only for his Word, but also for his enabling power.

³¹William Willimon, "Naked Preachers Are Distracting," *Christianity Today* (6 April 1998): 62. Thomas Oden adds these helpful words: "We take this office and bring to it our personal being, our unique experience, our existential life and language, and we then infuse the office with our personality. The office of preaching needs the imprint of personality, without being reduced to it. You must risk telling your own story, not as an end in itself, but rather as a sharply focused lens through which the whole Christian story is refracted" (*Pastoral Theology* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983], 131).

³²Sunderland and Shelp, "Prophetic Ministry," 9.

Empowered by God's prophetic spirit, pastors become a "presence," as Williams puts it—"a flaming incarnate conscience, like Nathan before the sinning David, or Elijah, confronting the cowardly, despicable Ahab in Naboth's vineyard."³³ They enter the pulpit, having sought for God to unite Word and Spirit with their spirits (Col 3:16 with Eph 5:18). Anything less, and ministry will suffer from a failure of confidence, reflect dependence upon personal abilities, and tend to take its cues from the audience. Such preaching will lack authority, coming across as asking for permission to speak, rather than as empowered preaching that boldly enters our hearts and demands a change.³⁴

B. Prophetic Proclamation

Preparation sets the stage for proclamation. Ezekiel, justifying his task, explained, "So I prophesied as I was commanded" (Ezek 37:7; cf. Isa 8:11; Jer 20:7; Ezek 11:5; Joel 1:1; Amos 3:8). The prophet neither dared to omit a word nor shrink from declaring all of it (Jer 26:2). He was not to utter falsely (1 Kgs 18:20-40), nor go beyond its boundaries, thus creating a new word (Deut 18:20). Sharpened and pointed, their messages shot like an arrow into a particular situation.³⁵

Prophetic pastors are hearers and proclaimers. They are under divine constraint, summoned to stand between God and man, and driven by a divine message. James Smart puts it this way,

An ear open continually toward God to hear what he has to say to weary, broken, stumbling humanity and a tongue ready and disciplined to speak the cauterizing and healing words—that is the true portrait of a prophet.³⁶

Whether the hearers respond or not, they will know "that a prophet has been among them" (Ezek 2:5). So what characterizes proclamation? Prophetic preaching reveals three things:

1. God's Prophets Preach a Message of Passion

There are few writings so ablaze with passion as the prophetic books. God's prophets burned with fire. Vitality, power, inspiration, vision—these were the qualities and gifts of the prophets.³⁷ It should

³³Williams, *Prophetic Ministry for Today*, 34.

³⁴David Fisher speaks well to the issue of authority in preaching (*The 21st Century Pastor* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 244f.).

³⁵Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 49.

³⁶Smart, *The Rebirth of Ministry*, 55.

³⁷Williams, *Prophetic Ministry for Today*, 136. Blenkinsopp, in defining the prophet, writes: "Another distinguishing mark in contrast to the legislator, teacher of ethics, religious reformer, or mystic leader, is the elements of vital, emotional preaching" (*Sage, Priest, Prophet*, 116).

not be surprising. Like heated kettles that release steam, the prophets released the Word. They were in discomfort until the message was discharged. Jeremiah found that keeping God's Word to himself was wearisome (Jer 6:11). Holding down the lid was nothing less than a burden, a "load" (as the Hebrew *massa* implies). On another occasion, he likened it to a "fire shut up in [his] bones" (Jer 20:9). It was either preach the Word or be consumed by it. When Amos received God's Word, his reaction was simply, "The Sovereign Lord has spoken—who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8). The prophet was under compulsion, exhibiting such unusual energy that in the release he was a different person (1 Sam 10:6-9; 19:24).

The church hungers for pastors with the same energy. Those preachers serious about fulfilling their prophetic role will experience similar dynamics. They will enter the community like an Isaiah, coming out of the gates, resolute and passionate (Isa 1:2), as a Jeremiah without fear (Jer 1:17), as an Ezekiel without concern (Ezek 2:6). Like Paul, they will view themselves as men under divine constraint. When the apostle wrote, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16), he was echoing those in the prophetic tradition who were compelled to preach or die. Pastors today need to feel the same fire burning in their bones. Joseph Stowell uses another metaphor, likening Saturday night to labor pains and Sunday morning to giving birth.³⁸ One paces before the start of service, anxious to release what God has created within. As Richard Neuhaus describes him,

Here is no smooth therapist, no peddler of religious palmsman-critic, no seven o'clock news commentator on portentous events. No, here is a preacher who has been visited by the seraphim with a burning coal from the altar.³⁹

2. God's Prophets Preach a Message of Prediction

The Jeremiahs of old cared about the future and longed for it. Prediction was not dominant, but it was part of their message. They anticipated the future, and so must we. While there should be the ongoing ministry of encouragement and strengthening for the present (something also described as prophetic ministry in Acts 15:32), we must help our people look beyond the present and into the future. We must boldly declare that the world as it is will be recreated to become the world that God wants it to be.⁴⁰ The biblical expectation of pastors is that they, to a time-bound audience, must consistently remind their people that one day swords will be beaten into plowshares, that death will be swallowed up, and that good will triumph. While it can be foolish to tie present-day events with

³⁸Stowell, *Shepherding the Church*, 219.

³⁹Richard Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 173.

⁴⁰Yancey, "The Bible's 'Fusty Old Men,'" 20.

prophetic texts, or identify toes and horns, prophetic pastors remind the people that the stage is being set for Christ's return.

3. A Prediction of Judgment

God's prophets confronted a spiritually gutted nation. And while they kept before people the vision of God, the imminent champion, companion God—"the unfailing spring of inexhaustible strength, unquenchable hope, indefatigable patience, the undying fire"⁴¹—they pointed out the consequences of national, family, and personal behavior (Amos 4:1-3; Isa 1:20; 5:5-6, 18-23; chaps. 12ff; 66:15-16). Their very words were the judgment. Jeremiah's words were described as the "fire," and the hearers were the wood that it would consume (Jer 5:14).

The words of judgment have often been vivid. Jeremiah, as with Amos, likened the coming judgment to a lion emerging from its thicket (Jer 4:7). Prophets saw themselves as men stationed on the walls, giving warning of an approaching enemy. Isaiah and Ezekiel likened their callings to that of watchmen (Isa 21:11; Ezek 3:17), forewarning people of their covenant obligations and urging kings to put their houses in order (cf. 2 Kgs 20:1). And when the nation refused to listen, there was no other course but to declare that God's judgment would fall (Amos 4:12).

Regardless of the response, our preaching must have a similar ominous ring, alerting listeners to the subtle idolatries that can sway people away from God, warning of consequences where injustices prevail, and declaring that this present world will pass away. We too must be willing to declare, "Prepare to meet your God."

What this requires is an attitude of constant attendance. Clerg, must be on their watchtower (not merely in their ivory tower), vigilant to the potential dangers that may confront their people. Watchmen do no good if, by a false sense of respect, they allow the people to sleep and perish in their sins.⁴² Like prophets of old, pastors must deliver the word forcefully, not shrinking from a needed word of judgment. They must, without hesitation, help people to see that the God of OT judgment has the same standards and demands in this age (cf. Rom 11:20-21).

It is a great disservice to be silent about sin. As Cornelius Plantinga notes about the prophets, "The prophets rebuke sin in Israel not just because it breaks God's law, but ultimately because it breaks the peace, because it breaks even the people who commit it."⁴³ The prophets sound a passionate alarm because they understand the demands of holiness, as well as the damage that sin can do. Sin is suicidal, like pulling the plug on one's own resuscitator. The average

⁴¹Williams, *Prophetic Ministry for Today*, 131.

⁴²Thomas Oden, *Becoming a Minister* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 32.

⁴³Cornelius Plantinga, "The Sinner and the Fool," *First Things* 46 (October 1994):

person cannot see this, but prophets, attuned to God, see the higher stakes, the deeper corruptions.⁴⁴ They also reckon with the fact that should they not say anything, the soul that died without their warning will be laid to their account (cf. Ezek 3:18; Acts 20:26-27). This is a sobering responsibility. If we don't take heed to declare God's word of possible judgment, we will bear the price of the soul. Like Paul, we must ask, "Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (2 Cor 11:29).

4. *A Prediction of Comfort*

The message of ancient prophets included kindness, admonition, and severity. There was a gentleness as well as a harshness, for both reflect God's character. There was hope, as well as consequences. Paul urged the Romans to think of God this way, both as kind and severe (Rom 11:22). Behind even the harshest of messages, the prophets always held out hope. Alongside his pronounced woes, Jeremiah spoke the words, "The days are coming," declares the Lord, 'when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch'" (Jer 23:5). Amidst the experience of loss, he uttered, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer 29:11). He spoke of a day God would refresh the weary and satisfy those who are faint (Jer 31:25).

Few inspired like Isaiah. Beyond the brilliance of his social criticism was his vision of the transcendent purposes of God.⁴⁵ Isaiah spoke of a new reign like David's (Isa 11:1-9), a future paradisaical Zion (Isa 2:2-4; 28:16), and a day when God's people will be led forth in peace (Isa 55:12). "No matter how dark and dismal was the picture which they painted of the world in which they lived, they never laid down their brush till they had tinged the horizon with golden fire."⁴⁶ Whole sections of the prophets were given to consoling, comforting, encouraging (Isaiah 40-55; Jeremiah 30-33; Ezekiel 40-48).

Pastors, who properly carry out their predictive role, do the same thing. Woven into their preaching, which at times may be stinging, must always be encouragement. While there is a prophetic role of exposing choices, even denouncing sins when necessary, there is another responsibility inherent in the task—to inspire a hopeful future. Walter Brueggeman captures it with these words:

But note well, the prophetic is not understood primarily as denunciation or rejection, unless it is clear that there is a positive

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 66.

⁴⁶Jefferson, *The Minister as Prophet*, 64.

alternative available that, in fact, is true, gives life, and really functions.⁴⁷

As the prophets preached a word of hope, so we must often offer the hope of renewal and restoration through repentance and through the hope of Messiah's return.

5. *God's Prophets Preach a Message of Protest*

The prophets were the social conscience of Israel, and their protest went in two directions.

a. Protest Against the Status Quo

With fire in their bones and warning in their voices, the prophets appeared on history's stage and challenged the existing religious, political, and economic structures. They were a destabilizing presence, for they questioned the legitimacy of the system. The prophets contested absolute claims, and then they presented alternatives.⁴⁸ Sadly, many of the hearers sought stability, comfort, and status quo. Hence, they gravitated to alternative voices, insipid ones that gave false assurances and made few demands. Those false voices who accommodated to the peoples' wishes, who wanted the applause of men more than the reward from God, sacrificed the truth upon the altar of acceptance and prophesied falsely. And like today, the people loved it (cf. Jer 5:31).

Nonetheless, out of a passion for truth, God's prophets stood their ground and prophesied against acts of ungodliness, against the false gods that culture created to follow (Jer 1:27-28; 7:16f; 10:1-3). God's men took on those who tickled ears. Ezekiel saved some of his severest language for these false shepherds of Israel, who were focused on their own affairs and less concerned with the well-being of the sheep (Ezek 34:1-10). Jeremiah likened the godless priests and prophets to straw, a substance having nothing in common with grain (Jer 23:10, 28).

The prophets led a protest against those who failed to reckon with the Sovereign One. Just as false prophets and priests were rebuked, so were false kings, leaders who rejected the notion that Yahweh alone was King. Elijah mocked the agents, sponsors, and benefactors of the dominant system. He took on Ahab and his religious system, ridiculing their incapacity and ineptness.

Is it too much to say that a similar spirit of protest is required of contemporary pastors? If not, what is required? It will demand that we confront conditions as they are, rejecting certain political influences and refusing to pander to the passions of the masses. With Micaiah, each one must declare, "I can tell him only what the Lord

⁴⁷Brueggemann, "The Prophet," 52.

⁴⁸Ibid.

tells me" (1 Kgs 22:14). To those who govern, prophetic preachers must "audaciously clarify sovereignty," challenging those who assume they hold the power to make the nation safe.⁴⁹ Pastors are called not to preserve and protect things as they are, but to call for the changes holiness demands. It is critical that they open the eyes of their people to the dominant language of this world system while challenging the church to be an alternative culture. Those who lead the worship of God are required to "stand things on their heads in the perceptions of its audience, to rob the established order of the most fundamental power of all: its sheer facticity."⁵⁰

If this prophetic role is not carried out, if our message does not embody biblical truth and moral fiber, Clapp warns that we as a culture will continue to become "systematically miseducated, underestimated, financially pampered, and morally exploited."⁵¹ We will fail to see what is really in front of us. Personal choice will remain a cover for abortion on demand, and death with dignity will serve to mask euthanasia. Those with convictions will appear as narrow-minded, and those who are intolerant of sexual perversion will be seen as bigots. The hope is prophetic pastors, who will expose secular deceptions, unmask the idols that keep the system running, and inform hearers of the principalities and powers behind it all. Jesus, in his prophetic role, was constantly doing this.

Protesting against the status quo will require integration into community and, paradoxically, a certain disengagement from it. Pastors will need to be attuned to their age, informed regarding their culture, and involved with lives inside and outside of the church. Yet, prophets must always maintain a certain distance. OT prophets were detached from society, which gave them freedom and boldness to speak as God commanded. Elijah, for example, was even given a different food supply. Shifting to the NT, John escaped to the desert. Jesus summoned his disciples to leave their nets and renounce the rulers of their age. The more we are absorbed into things as they are, the tamer will be our message and the duller will be our protest.

b. Protest Against Injustice

Injustice, bondage, and every other residue of sin repelled the prophets of the past. They saw how sin victimized people, and excesses burdened the poor. And so, from Moses to Malachi, God's prophetic voices assaulted every social disorder (cf. Amos 5:6-7). They cared intensely about the moral shape of society. Hence, there was a well-developed moral content to their pronouncements; the consequences of injustice were delineated with great clarity.⁵² The prophet reflected God's concern for the poor and helpless, as well as

⁴⁹Hauerwas, "The Pastor as Prophet," 42.

⁵⁰Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, 96.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 192.

⁵²Sunderland and Shelp, "Prophetic Ministry," 9.

his anger towards oppression of any sort. With the passion that flows out of a heart outraged by the status quo, they spoke out for the oppressed.⁵³

So must today's prophetic pastors speak, for ours is a world moving in a direction of moral failure and injustice at every level. A bumper sticker in Portland, Oregon, has aptly summed up our age: "If You're Not Outraged—You're not Paying Attention." Lust has weakened the nation's leaders, while greed has disenfranchised the weak and the poor. As one editorial argues, it is no longer an arms race, but a prosperity race, in which the rich no longer want to carry the poor.⁵⁴ If God's prophets do not speak up for them, protesting the injustice of it all, who will?

Such protest must become a form of aggression, for God is conducting holy war, the field of conflict being the human heart. The prophets invite contemporary pastors to stand up with them and ask, "What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the face of the poor?" (Isa 3:15). They urge men to look into the eyes of those ruled by greed and say with Nathan the prophet: "You are the man!" (2 Sam 12:7). They challenge pastors to be contemporary Elijahs, issuing a choice, "How long will you waver between two opinions?" (1 Kgs 18:21). As un intimidated critics of corrupted society, prophetic pastors call for people to make their decision—God or Baal, holiness or sin, justice or injustice.⁵⁵ They warn of judgment where the choice is wrong. They risk offense, knowing that, ultimately, it is the gospel that is the offense, and it is the Word that is the scandal.

The true prophet speaks with the heart of a pastor and with the passion of one who has seen and felt the pain and suffering of the dispossessed, the helpless, and the disenfranchised.⁵⁶ But such passion moves beyond the hurting, even to those leveling the hurt (cf. Prov 24:17). As Earl Shelp notes, "The true prophets' denunciation has the force of righteousness to the extent that it is born out of care—both for the oppressed and the oppressors."⁵⁷ And it comes with the hope that lives will turn around and take advantage of the grace a longsuffering God always holds out. Thus, it is far more than mere social criticism. It is preaching done out of a passion for God's righteousness, and also out of compassion for people. As Bonhoeffer noted, "Nothing can be more cruel than the

⁵³Smart, *The Rebirth of Ministry*, 57-58.

⁵⁴George F. Will, "The Poor are Unwanted in the 'Secessionist Age,'" *International Herald Tribune* (25 June 1998). Will warns of a present "dismantlement" going on in the world. "Prosperity has dethroned power as the primary concern of states." Hence, when a cultural or ethnic group decides that it is the principal generator of wealth in a larger nation or federation, a secessionist movement is just a press release away. Mexico (north/south), Italy, Germany, Spain are recent examples, that, in part, must be countered by prophets in the church.

⁵⁵Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 139.

⁵⁶Sunderland and Shelp, "Prophetic Ministry," 11.

⁵⁷Ibid.

tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that recalls a brother back from the path of sin."⁵⁸ Williams continues, "While he may strive with his fiery invectives to sting and burn callous consciences into sensitiveness, he must still love the sinner while he hates the sin."⁵⁹

C. Prophetic Performance

The prophets of God have not only left us a model of preparation and a manner of proclamation—their lives also teach us how to live.

1. Prophetic Pastors Live a Life of Identification

They are not mere dispensers of truth, untouched by sin and hurt and insulated by the walls of their sanctuaries. Prophetic pastors walk with their people. Micah's example is illustrative of most OT prophets. After declaring judgment against Israel and Judah, he determined to identify with his people, declaring: "Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl" (Mic 1:8). The prophet not only presented a painful message at times, but he engaged in the pain. Daniel lived an exemplary life. Nonetheless, he stood alongside his exiled people and declared before God, "We have sinned and done wrong. . . . We have not listened to your servants" (Dan 9:5-6).

Jeremiah is remembered far more for his weeping than his invectives (cf. Jer 9:1). His identification with his people placed him in apparent conflict with God's Word. The moral currency of Israel was devalued to such an extent that intercession was deemed worthless, even an act of disobedience. Jeremiah nonetheless prayed. Despite divine warnings that God would not hear (see Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 15:1), Jeremiah sought for God's ear. Lamentations, Jeremiah's funeral service for Jerusalem, closes with these words of intercession—"Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may return" (Lam 5:21). Give us another chance! Like other prophets, he often found himself standing in the middle. Smart gives this description of the tension:

God's purpose is his purpose and God's word his word, and yet at the same time, bonded with his nation, carrying upon his heart the burden of its sin and the peril of its situation, so that he feels in himself the agony of the judgment he proclaims.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Dietrick Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper, 1954), 107.

⁵⁹Williams, *Prophetic Ministry for Today*, 130.

⁶⁰Smart, *The Rebirth of Ministry*, 55.

Habakkuk, despite the harshness of his message, prayed, "in wrath, remember mercy" (Hab 3:2). These men were never mere spectators on the sidelines, but were linked in the togetherness of all that is human. It would be a mistake to see them as angry men, unrestrained and uncaring in their zeal. The reality is that a shepherd's tender heart was behind all they did. Elijah spoke as courageously, as forcefully as any. Yet textured in his history are pictures of a man deeply present with the most needy. "A prophet hears not one imperative but two: prescription and compassion, a love of truth and an abiding solidarity with those for whom that truth has eclipsed."⁶¹

It's the same with pastors who choose to be prophetic. They have not fulfilled their ministries by merely preparing and proclaiming God's truths. As Stott notes, "Truth is powerful when it is argued; it is even more powerful when it is exhibited."⁶² As God's representatives, they must also enter into and share the sufferings of those who might be working through the effects of their disobedience. Like the weeping prophet Jeremiah, prophetic pastors mourn for their culture and cry with their people. This is the first order of pastoral ministry.⁶³ Too often, however, we distance ourselves. Preaching becomes shrill, praying becomes compartmentalized (taking on the tone of Luke 18:11), and sinful conditions remain status quo.

2. *Prophetic Pastors Live a Life of Sacrifice*

Because of the nature of their task, OT prophets were not strangers to difficulty. Often they experienced loneliness and isolation. Jeremiah writes, "I sat alone because your hand was against me" (Jer 15:17). The people wanted to hear pleasant words. They gravitated to those who prophesied illusions (Isa 6:10). But God's prophets declared the truth, and it exposed them to ridicule and injury (cf. Isa 6:11; 20:1-6; Jeremiah 16; Daniel 6; Hos 1:1-3; Hab 3:1-2). It placed them in conflict with the established religious leaders of the day. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, ordered Amos to get out of town (Amos 7:12). God's men were insulted, tossed into dungeons and wells, and even sawed in half (Heb 11:36-38). Jeremiah speaks throughout his book about writhing in pain; the agony of his heart; his heart pounding within him—he could not keep silent (cf. Jer 11:18-23; 12:6; 18:18; 20:1-3; 26:1-24). Abuse was so prevalent that Jesus characterized Jerusalem in his day as a prophetic killing field.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²John Stott, *Involvement: Being a Responsible Christian in a Non-Christian Society* (2 vols.; Old Tappan: Revell, 1984), 1:110.

⁶³Eugene H. Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 126.

When OT prophets pronounced God's judgments to the people, it often prompted maledictions of their own (note Jer 15:10).⁶⁴

God's watchmen could have huddled with cowards and allowed evil and simplemindedness to hold sway; instead they raised their voices like a trumpet and declared to people their transgressions (Isa 58:1). Nathan, as David's pastor, carried out this prophetic role, warning the king of the consequences of his adultery and murder, a dirge chanted in all the historical and prophetic books of the OT. He did it with courage, knowing it could have cost him his life. Jeremiah's words stung a culture's pride and brought its wrath. Yet, he, as well as his peers, were not unpatriotic. Rather, to use Stanley Crouch's phrase, they lived out an "unsentimental patriotism" that was not afraid to call the people back to God.⁶⁵

Prophets in contemporary society will also be subject to the same risks. Ministry is inseparably linked with difficulty. Failing to live within the world's parameters, pastors will experience isolation and separation (cf. 2 Corinthians 6). Those who take uncompromising moral stands, confront unethical parishioners, and preach unpopular truths will be castigated as pessimistic and sanctimonious fussbudgets. The preference will be for ministers who are chaplains of religious expectations and guardians of cherished traditions. Paul warned of this in 2 Tim 4:3-4. In the context of his own appeal to pastors to be prophetic, to preach in season and out, he warned Timothy that days would come when people would gravitate to preachers who would confirm their illusions.

Those who stand firm will unleash contemporary Jezebels who scream, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them" (1 Kgs 19:2). The flesh will scream, and the devil will bare his teeth. After all, the human heart is fiercely guarded ground. Neuhaus warns,

The preacher who insists we wrestle with his truth, which he has wrestled from God's truth, is vulnerable to being rejected as a liar, fool, or false teacher. The stakes are much higher for him. The prow of the pulpit makes waves.⁶⁶

All of this will demand a bold and dauntless faith. To be a prophet demands courage, for a prophet of God is called to confront the evil of his day (Amos 3:7-8). The line must be drawn, the demand must be made, and informing must become inflaming.⁶⁷ Regardless of the response of those to whom one ministers, it is the call of God to

⁶⁴Deryck Sheriffs, *The Friendship of the Lord* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 227.

⁶⁵Michael Cromartie, "The Omni-American," *Books & Culture* 4 (May/June 98): 14.

⁶⁶Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry*, 172.

⁶⁷As Oden puts it, "There are times when the preacher must have the courage to stand up as the conscience of the community, as an unintimidated critic of a corrupted society" (*Pastoral Theology*, 139).

which one must remain loyal. When one experiences God's prophetic call, he is left with no option.⁶⁸ There is an obligation to obey a God who loves his church to the utmost. A person with a sense of call, a sense of mission, does not hesitate to accept scorn and derision. As Sunderland notes, a prophet "does what he has to do."⁶⁹ Yet, with the sacrifice comes great reward—the privilege of being God's mouthpiece, of suffering for the cause of Christ (Phil 3:10).

3. *Prophetic Pastors Live a Life of Obedience*

The prophets, for the most part, did not run from their calling. There were exceptions, such as Jonah, who ran from the presence and calling of God. Others capitulated to the whims of the hearers, telling the people what they wanted to hear (cf. Jeremiah 14). But in the main, the prophets were faithful. At times, God's expectation for their lives bordered on the outrageous. The prophets were ordered to stand eye-to-eye with wicked kings and pronounce judgment, commanded to go naked, lie down for months, marry prostitutes, and pray in defiance of edicts by pagan rulers.

Should we commit ourselves to the prophetic task, God will lay demands before us that will tempt us to run. We will probably not be faced with the burdens God placed on Ezekiel or Jeremiah, but all the same, we will be tempted to run from the prophetic task. We will find ourselves called to a Ninevah of sorts, and our proneness to disobedience will lure us to Tarshish. Peterson writes candidly of what this is like for modern prophets.⁷⁰ We will question the compatibility of integrating the prophetic role in a pastoral setting. Can we truly be a prophet, and at the same time a pastor? Is there not an inherent conflict in the terms? How can we preach prophetic sermons to a congregation that would much prefer comfort? How can we tell unpleasant truths to people we have learned to love? Richard Niebuhr prepares us for the tension: "Once personal contact is established you are very prone to temper your wind to the shorn sheep."⁷¹ Budding priests never bloom into parish prophets.

IV. CONCLUSION

There is an obvious need, there is biblical rationale, and there is a clear paradigm for prophetic ministry. Taking our cues from the OT

⁶⁸Sunderland and Shelp, "Prophetic Ministry," 9.

⁶⁹Ibid., 10. Oden adds this counsel: "Pastoral courage is needed to identify accurately the particular deficit or injustice or lack of awareness in the flock at a given time. But if you are going to offend the flock, offend them with the truth. You have it turned around if you yourself are the offense. Let the gospel be the offense; let the word be the scandal; let the truth be the offense. That is good preaching in the prophetic tradition" (*Pastoral Theology*, 138).

⁷⁰Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), see chap 1.

⁷¹See quote in Hauerwas, "The Pastor as Prophet," 29.

prophet, we realize the importance of a necessary balance between love and justice, truth and kindness (Prov 3:3). Being prophetic is not inconsistent with being a pastor. We must be obedient to the calling of both.

Kenneth Kaunda, former President of Zambia, some time ago declared, "What a nation needs more than anything else is not a Christian ruler in the palace but a Christian prophet within earshot."⁷² The same could be said of the church. When people intersect with the ministry of a pastor, they need to have heard the words and sensed the heart of a prophet. Pastors are not mandated to replicate an Elijah or a Jeremiah, or any other OT prophet, but they need to take the prophetic picture as unveiled in the OT and incorporate it into their identity.

An earlier prophetic pastor gave this challenge:

Let us cultivate and develop the prophetic element in our ministry. Let the spirit of the prophet fuse into oneness and inspire with its spiritual vitality all the other offices and functions of our many-sided ministry. For it is the supreme and essential, the basic and noblest element in it.⁷³

⁷²Quoted in Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 246.

⁷³Williams, *Prophetic Ministry for Today*, 24.

