

Believing The Prophets

Prophets, whatever else they are, are always “warm-up” men for the God who sends them. They have a massive religious obedience to the message they find themselves charged to proclaim. This doesn’t, of course, prevent them from being what their audience calls “hostile and confrontational”. There are few figures in history or literature who could claim to be more so than Jeremiah, Elijah, and the rest. They stand up against nations, and arraign the confidence of kings and governors: nothing human can overawe them. But before God they are humility itself, totally submissive and selfless. Even if they try to evade their vocation, it won’t work. That reverence for God which governs their life will not let them off the hook. So you could never confuse a true prophet with one of the self-opinionated, self-appointed, self-obsessed people who pretend to have something important to say, but who are in fact only working out their mad need to dominate others and impose themselves; there is a fundamental difference between a prophet and a dictator.

I Hope I’m Right

Even so, it’s a fearful thing to receive a prophet’s message as God’s message. How did their hearers make their minds up, whether they were confronted by a messenger of heaven, or a deluded and dangerous crank? I suspect most opt for the latter judgment as the safest. But if they’re wrong, then they lose the truth of God, refusing to welcome his messenger, and thus refusing God himself. And this has been the default position of the human race: *if in doubt, stay on the fence*. Jesus found this the one attitude he could not deal with: cowardly and imprisoned in self, such people were unreachable. He heard in their voice a deeply-ingrained faithlessness, that said: *God will never speak to me, God does not see my life*. The Old Testament knows that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God*. But what’s the alternative? To remain fast on the precipice, and to wait for our own resources to be exhausted. In the end, our need for God will

overtake us all. That’s the rule in the creation: God says: *Every knee shall bend before me, and every tongue shall praise God*.

How Should We Be?

How should our life look now, if we are living it properly? I think we have to receive the Word of God as the prophets did, and acknowledge that God has the right to say how our life will unfold, and accept that whatever he calls us to endure or perform will be for our good in the end. There may be nothing positive in our suffering, or its infliction; but our endurance will teach us to trust God, whose reward will annihilate all suffering. You can always tell if someone has that basic obedience to God in place: they exhibit a certain indifference to the big noises and magnates of the world, based on their knowledge that obedience to God is quite enough for one little life. But we must truly obey God, and not pretend. Advent is a good time to look for signs that we’re obeying God. Today, for instance, the command of God is in the first line of the introit: *Rejoice!* If we obey God, we contradict our indifference and pessimism, and rejoice! God never commands the impossible, and this command entails a lot of promises of joy; but you’ve got to believe the prophets in order to reap their benefit. *Never try to suppress the Spirit, or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt*.

Giving Way To God

Giving way to God means losing nothing, but finding ourselves. His intent is that we should be utterly fulfilled, and everything which stands between us and our fulfilment will be dramatically removed from our path. That God has decided this is utterly certain, and he will make good his plans for us. Our substitute plans for the Creation can do nothing except set back the day when our divine destiny comes. It matters little that we should find ourselves in a bit of a wilderness as we listen to these words: God has the power to do what his prophets tell us he will. We, as God tells the Israelites at the Red Sea, have only to believe.

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