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## PREACH WITH CLARITY:

PROPHETIC PREACHING THAT MOVES  
THE SOUL AND MAKES A DIFFERENCE  
AT THE 2016 INTERNATIONAL PASTORS &  
LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE #PL2016

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# **WHAT IS “PROPHETIC PREACHING?”**



# **Clarifying the Definition**

## **Prophetic Utterances**

### **Versus**

## **Prophetic Preaching**



# Prophetic Christianity

“... Prophetic Christianity... is the call for renewal and transformation in the quest to resist empire and establish alternative spheres of peace, justice, reconciliation, hope, and redemption in the world.... It is a theology of difference rooted in the prophetic call for justice and reconciliation in the church and society.”

Johnny Bernard Hill, *Prophetic Rage: A Postcolonial Theology of Liberation*



# Prophetic Ministry

“The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness, and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us. Thus, I suggest that prophetic ministry has to do not primarily with addressing specific public crises but with addressing, in season and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation coopted and domesticated.”

Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*



# The Prophet

“The prophet is someone who is **on fire** for justice, hypersensitive to the suffering of others, especially the weak, the vulnerable, the fatherless, motherless... A prophetic person tells the truth, exposes lies, bears witness and then, usually, is pushed to the margins or shot dead.”

Cornell West, *Black Prophetic Fire*



# Prophetic Preaching

**“Prophetic preaching** is dangerous work, not only because it has a subversive edge but because it requires an epistemological break with the assumed world of dominant imagination. This epistemological break makes us aware of our assumptions we have not recognized or reflected upon.”

Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*



# Prophetic Preaching is when You Tell it Like it I-S...IS!

- Prophetic preaching is *clear* preaching:
  - Clear **conviction** – don't leave people wondering what you believe.
  - Clear **message** – more than a great delivery; everybody needs to know what the message is.
  - Clear **articulation** – tell it well. Make their ears stand up!



# **EXAMPLES OF GREAT PROPHETIC PREACHING**



**Isabella Baumfree (Sojourner Truth) was a prophetic preacher. The Spirit stirred her up. She was full of a bold conviction to preach an unpopular but clear message. Her diction was not clear but her message was articulate – “Ain’t I a Woman?”**



“If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back , and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.” Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?”

This message bore the full weight of an **offensive but liberating** gospel amidst American misogyny and black oppression.



**Frederick Douglass** was a prophetic preacher. The Spirit stirred him up. He was full of a **bold conviction** to preach an **unpopular** but **clear message**. He “cried loud” against the established church that did nothing to break the back of slavery and prejudice against blacks for many years.



Cornel West suggests that, “**Ida B. Wells** was ‘prophetic’ looked American terrorism in the face. She looked lynching in the face. She was run out of Tennessee – bounty on her head – and then went to England. She was willing to speak truths at the cost of life.”



**Isaiah** was prophetic. He testifies (Isaiah 6:1–8),

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple... And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” ... And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”<sup>9</sup> And he said, “Go, and say to this people...”



**Paul** was a prophetic preacher. In Acts 9 he testifies,

“Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’”



**The Lord Jesus** was prophetic. In Luke 4:18-19  
Jesus says,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to  
proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”



“A study of the prophets of Israel must try to take into account both the evidence of the **Old Testament and the contemporary situation of the church**. What we understand about the **Old Testament must be somehow connected with the realities of the church today**.”

Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*



“I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled poets to write their poetry but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their *sublime messages without knowing* in the least what they mean.”

Socrates



# The Privilege of Prophetic Preaching

## A CALL TO ACTION

“Prophetic ministry consists of *offering an alternative perception of reality* and in *letting people see their own history* in the light of *God’s freedom* and *his will for justice*.”

Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*



# The Problem of Prophetic Preaching

“‘Prophetic preaching,’ undertaken by working  
pastors, is profoundly difficult and leaves the preacher  
in an ambiguous and exposed position.



# The Problem of Prophetic Preaching

The task is difficult because such a preacher must at the same time 'speak truth' while maintaining a budget, a membership, and a program in a context that is often not prepared for such truthfulness. Indeed, given the seductions and accommodations of many congregations, not to mention larger judicatories in the church, such venues are often not readily venues for truth-telling."

Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*



# The Problem of Prophetic Preaching (Cont'd)

Marvin McMickle explains three things that have contributed to the demise of prophetic preaching:

1. An overzealous **preoccupation with the place of praise** in some churches and services of worship (which has resulted in pastors' **downplaying or ignoring the pain and suffering** of our world);



# The Problem of Prophetic Preaching (Cont'd)

2. A **false and narrow view of patriotism** (that has sometimes equated unqualified praise of country with love of country);
3. A focus in preaching on **personal enrichment** themes or a **prosperity gospel** to the exclusion or detriment of the gospel's broader social justice claims.

Marvin McMickle, *Where Have all the Prophets Gone?*



# Two Extremes in Prophetic Preaching

**CONSERVATIVES:** There is a common conservative assumption is that the prophets were merely predictors, those who tell the future, with particular reference to predictions of the coming Christ.

Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*



# Two Extremes in Prophetic Preaching (Con't)

“A problem with conservatives is that they bootstrap to party political agendas, assuming that they have the greatest advantage for social impact. Conservative Christians define themselves more so along the political vein of ‘family values’ and abortion and ignoring other important justice issues.”

Marvin McMickle, *Where Have all the Prophets Gone?*



# Two Extremes in Prophetic Preaching

**LIBERALS:** There is a common liberal assumption that the prophets were social activists who worked to establish social justice. However, the ancient prophets only rarely took up any concrete social issue.

Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*



# **Two Extremes in Prophetic Preaching**

A problem with liberals is that they bootstrap to party political agendas, assuming that they have the greatest advantage for social impact. Liberal Christians, then, define themselves primarily in accordance with human sexuality and gay rights and ignoring other important justice issues.

Marvin McMickle, *Where Have all the Prophets Gone?*



# Prophetic Preaching in the Context of Prophetic Christianity

“The tradition of prophetic Christianity still represents one of the most powerful aspects of the Christian narrative. It is the element of Christianity that demand ***constant renewal*** and ***reform***, that refuses to rest with doctrines and creeds alone, but calls for immediate and unrequited ***justice, love, peace, healing*** and ***reconciliation*** in God’s creation.”

Johnny B. Hill, *Prophetic Rage*

