

False Prophets Encourage Spiritual Ease

Remember your favorite Kodak moment? Christmas? A birthday celebration? The birth of your first child? After years of leading the photography business, Kodak's bankruptcy in 2012 brought no Kodak moment. Instead, Kodak's failure became the topic of business researchers to determine the causes of its demise.

Among the many reasons given, an insidious cause surfaced: complacency. Kodak became at ease with their successes.

Too many of us know the insidious dangers of ease as skills diminish with the passage of time. We no longer type 80 words a minute. We cannot run across the street let alone around the block. A good brisk walk eludes us because of the years of ease.

An old Bible story yet a timely one describes the dangers of ease. It happened after the death of King David, Israel's most illustrious king. Israel split into two nations: Israel to the north, Judah to the south. Israel had its king, Jeroboam II, while Uzziah governed Judah.

Amos, a shepherd and sheep breeder, served God as a prophet in Israel and Judah at that time. During Amos' prophetic ministry, both Israel and Judah rebelled against God and rejected Him. They maintained a formal appearance of worshipping God, while continuing to worship idols. Their simultaneous worship of idols and God resulted in denial of Jehovah God, Who will not share His glory.

In addition, both nations pursued materialism. The Biblical record describes the wealthy who lounged at their tables and on cots of ivory. They amassed great and sumptuous possessions and found pleasure and security in the abundance of things. (Amos 6.4-7)

God sent Amos the prophet to these self-satisfied people with this message:

"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!" (Amos 6.1)

Zion, another name for Jerusalem, served as the chief city of Judah. The mountain of Samaria lay in Israel. As an evidence of God's grace, He sent Amos to startle both nations and awaken them out of their false sense of contentment.

False Prophets Encourage Spiritual Ease

False prophets rested on inferior peace. (Amos 6.4-6)

The people enjoyed safe and luxurious lives with an abundance of material possessions. They did not fear attack from enemies. Their lives of ease gave them confidence that they needed nothing.

A strict definition of "ease" gives a better picture of their true condition. It literally means recklessness, carelessness. Therefore, amid their prosperity with goods and possessions, they showed a careless attitude. They lacked concern over things which should have concerned them. They enjoyed a manufactured peace, endorsed by the misleading messages of the evil prophets.

Judah and Israel displayed smug contentment. They took pride in their "goodness." After all, they lived in peace and prosperity, but it degenerated into pride. They did not confront any severe conflicts. Their religious accomplishments contributed to a false sense of divine approval which resulted in apathy.

Contentment and apathy do not translate into peace. Judah and Israel rested on something they thought firm and safe. They did not realize the fragile weakness of their faulty foundations.

Israel and Judah turned from God, the only source of true joy and peace. They traded His glorious manifest presence for an inferior peace.

False prophets relied upon imitation power. (Amos 6.1)

The northern kingdom, Israel, trusted in the mountain of Samaria, which served as their headquarters. They worshiped God on that mountain and felt secure as long as they held possession of it. However, the extended prophecy of Amos describes that their enemy came in and took possession of their sacred mountain. Their mountain provided no safety for them in their time of need.

In similar fashion, the southern kingdom, Judah, trusted in the safety of Zion, or Jerusalem. The thick walls surrounding it with only 12 entrance gates made them feel secure. There came a day, however, when their enemy destroyed those walls, broke through the doors, captured Jerusalem, and laid waste to them. Their walls provided no protection to them in their time of need.

Amos commented about those named *the chief of the nations*, to whom the house of Israel is come. These people were the aristocracy, the leaders, and the elders. This broad group also included the kings and patriarchs of Israel and Judah.

In each of their histories, God had blessed them greatly with men of God, like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. They had a wonderful heritage to pass on to their children. (Amos 6.1-2) Both kingdoms rested on their heritages. They thought that their past godly leaders exempted them from existing and future problems. They placed their confidence in their history, not in God.

In Amos' day, they had a degenerate leadership, which neither followed God nor pursued Him. Instead, they sought false prophets and listened to them. Their incorrect hopes and reliance on their heroes failed in the time of hardship.

False prophets resorted to intentional protests against God. (Amos 5.21-26)

The false prophets and priests of Amos' day deliberately opposed God. The spiritual failure of the people came as a direct result of their evil leadership. They mixed the insincere worship of God with the worship of idols made of wood and stone by their own hands, complete with sacrifices and the celebration of feast days.

This man-made worship comfortably mixed with their natural cravings and pursuit of materialism. Their pluralistic worship made God only one among many gods.

These nations lost touch with the sacred. Their governmental and religious leaders failed to tell the people the truth. Leadership preached soothing messages that encouraged people to abandon God and believe the false messages of peace and goodness.

Thus, leaders failed to encourage the people to examine themselves in the light of God's word and His demands. Trusting their leaders, Israel and Judah saw no need to make changes in their lives. Repentance no longer described God's obstinate people.

Purpose Of God's Message Through Amos

The children of God in Amos' day forgot God. God sent Amos to them to convict them of their sin.

- They followed the false prophets who declared pleasant things to them.
- The people basked in luxury and laziness but forgot the afflicted among their midst.
- They rejected God and became idol worshippers.

God sent Amos to warn Judah and Israel of impending judgment upon them for their sin. He would send enemies against them and overcome their false security.

In this fashion, God also revealed certain aspects of His nature:

- His sovereignty over all nations, including Judah's and Israel's enemies;
- His grace and mercy in sending Amos to warn them to repent and to turn to God;
- His judgment upon sin;
- His holiness in His demands that they worship Him and Him alone; and
- His care for the afflicted among them.

Correlation

Professing believers today replay the conditions of Amos' era. We have not learned from history.

Rest upon an inferior peace

Many today rest upon an inferior peace. A false sense of security in a falsely presented gospel has led many to believe that they do not need to make any changes in their lives. Religious leaders of today fail to preach the necessity of repentance from sin as integral to the gospel message.

Further, false prophets, pastors, and leaders of local Christian assemblies do not teach the promised effects of conformity to Christ that results from true salvation, i.e., a new creature in Christ. Others live as they please because of a misleading view of freedom in Christ.

Immorality and, worse yet, amorality exists because so called Christ followers have lost touch with the sacred. A false understanding of the Biblical truth of “once saved, always saved and safe” produces a false sense of security and brings rampant sin into professing believers’ lives.

Reliance upon an imitation power

Today, professing believers and their professing Christian assemblies embrace practices that demonstrate unbelief in God’s power. Counterfeit teachers and preachers urge believers to yield to culture’s mores in the vain attempt to create peace and security.

Some appeal to human reason as the viable means of gospel presentation. Mankind’s hope does not rest upon good arguments. It rests upon the invisible ministry of the Holy Spirit to regenerate sinners and to convince them of Biblical truth.

Too often cultural appeasement leads pastors and religious leaders away from the counsel of God. This tragedy produces a dependence upon gimmicks, advertising, and promotion to increase and retain attendance. The deceit of excitement and enthusiasm for the reality of God’s glorious manifest presence leads to further spiritual decline.

Thus, many present-day preachers dilute the pure gospel of Christ by leaving out crucial elements and presenting part for the whole. In the hope that the world will find their message appealing, these misleading pastors fail to call their sinners to repentance or knowledge of grace that saves sinners.

Resort to intentional protests against God

Professing believers today rest on inferior peace and an imitation power, because we have rebelled against God, willfully following false prophets and their deceitful messages. Though results look attractive, they rest upon shaky foundations. They do not rest upon God alone by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The professing Christian Church emulates Israel and Judah, at ease, fooled by an inferior peace and imitation power. It resulted from an underlying intentional protest against God.

Implications

This passage from the prophet Amos provides a serious warning to us. False leaders of our day fail to teach the people to pursue God just as the false prophets did in the days of Amos. The severity of the warning should prod us to examine our circumstances, because we, too, have many possessions and live self-satisfied lives.

Faulty leadership of our day has lulled us to sleep with their mantra that “all is well in the Church.” We must recognize our true condition and heed the message that God gave to Amos thousands of years ago. We identify, in the message of Amos, symptoms that relate to us, warning signs that will help us to turn from reliance upon uncertain things to pursue after God and the firm foundation that He offers.

We need, once again, to restore the dignity of the Holy Spirit. We have set Him aside and refused to listen to His voice. Our hope rests on God Who, by His Holy Spirit, overcomes attacks on the truth, and convinces unbelievers of the truth when proclaimed.

We must remember what God said to Zechariah, when he faced a difficult time. Later in his life, Jerusalem lay in ruins, and Zechariah began to rebuild it. From a human standpoint, Zechariah faced an insurmountable task. God assured him with this promise,

“It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord.” (Zechariah 4.6)

If it is wrong to call the works of the Holy Spirit the works of men, and it is, it is equally sinful to call the

works of men the works of the Holy Spirit. That describes our trouble. We identify the works of men as the works of the Holy Spirit.

To experience once again the glorious manifest presence of God by His Holy Spirit, we must repent of our sin and return to the pursuit of God.

I call upon you and the Church of Jesus Christ to heed these warnings in the book of Amos and realize that we stand on the brink of judgment. We must examine to see whether we have substituted ease, contentment, and imitation power for the true peace of God.

We must restore, once again, the dignity of the person of the Holy Spirit of God.

Questions For Reflection And Application

01. How did Israel and Judah demonstrate their recklessness and carelessness?
02. How do you see the current professing Christian church living in a reckless and careless manner?
03. How has a false sense of security based upon a falsely presented gospel lead many to believe that they have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life?
04. What do you think led God's people to trust in geography instead of the omnipotent God of the universe?
05. Describe a food recipe guaranteed to fail because of mixing things together that were not meant to go together.
06. Describe a game that failed when the players followed different sets of rules.
07. Where have you experienced a false sense of security?
08. How would you know it if it happened? What do you use as your compass or foundation?
09. How does compromise with the current culture affect your spiritual stability?
10. Have you ever experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?
11. How can you recognize the work of the Holy Spirit?
12. What steps can you take to develop your relationship with the Holy Spirit that offers the true peace of God rather than an inferior peace that the world gives?

Heavenly Father, thank You for this record that You have given to us through Your man of God thousands of years ago, Amos, who called his people to pursue after You and to forsake that which is false.

I pray that You will use these same warnings in our day to cause us to awaken to the true circumstances where we live, to turn from them, to repent from them, and to pursue after You.

Help us to forsake our sin and to forsake those false leaders and prophets who would lead us astray. Enable us to seek after the truth of your Word so that we might rest upon true strength and power. Grant that we might experience the reality of Your peace.

We will give You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, honor, glory, and praise for what You accomplish in our lives. I ask these things, Father, in the name of Jesus Your Son.

Amen.