

A PROPHET'S REWARD

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One month ago, officers of the Minneapolis Police Department arrested George Floyd on suspicion of passing counterfeit currency. Floyd died while in their custody, and three medical examiners have concluded that the manner of his death was homicide. Many peaceably assembled to protest police brutality, but many engaged in insurrection and rebellion. Once again many are discussing race relations in the United States, especially the relation between blacks and whites, and some whites are going to extraordinary lengths to make peace with blacks. In the Third Ward area of Houston, Texas, where George Floyd grew up, a group of white Christians, led by Pastor Johnny Gentry, knelt on one knee before a group of Blacks, and apologized on behalf of whites for, as one church member put it, “years and years of racism.” Timothy Dalrymple, president and Chief Executive Officer of Christianity Today magazine, in a recent editorial asserted that the cause of the wealth gap between Whites and Blacks is “the persistence of racial prejudice and its enshrinement into the apparatus of government, and he argued that white evangelicals ought to repent and to make restitution to Blacks. (“Justice Too Long Delayed,” *Christianity Today*, June 10, 2020) These are but two of the many Christian leaders that are proclaiming this message, and many Christians are heeding it. This message is false, however. Everyone must repent of their own sins. It is no more right for men as a sex to repent of wife-beating, than it is for women as a sex to repent of prostitution. It is no more right for whites as a race to repent of the racism of some than it is for blacks as a race to repent of the racism of some. It is no more right for Christians to pay reparations to blacks for their enslavement than it is for Mohammedans to pay reparations to whites for theirs. Some Christians do wish to hear the truth, but there is none to tell it to them. Some, however, wish to hear a lie, and there are some who will tell it to them.

In the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah, and the first year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Jeremiah the prophet prophesied that God would, because of the sins of the people of Judah, send the Babylonian army to destroy the city of Jerusalem, and the temple, and carry the people away to Babylon, where they would remain in exile for seventy years. In the reign of Jeconiah, son of Jehoiakim, the army of Babylon did invade Jerusalem, they took captive Jeconiah, his mother, and all the nobles, and they took them away into exile in Babylon, along with the king's treasure. When Zedekiah succeeded Jeconiah as king in Judah, God commanded Jeremiah to secure a yoke of bondage around his own neck, and to send the same to Zedekiah, and the neighboring kings. He commanded Jeremiah to tell them that He had given Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to rule over them all, and that they should put their necks under his yoke. He commanded Jeremiah to tell them not to listen to their prophets who would tell them not to serve the king of Babylon. Jeremiah did as God commanded him. He told King Zedekiah that God commanded him and his people to serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, or die, and he told the king not to listen to the false prophets who would say otherwise. He said to the king:

Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. Why will ye die, thou and thy people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the LORD hath spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? Therefore hearken not unto the words of the prophets that speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of

Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. For I have not sent them, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. (Jeremiah 27:12-15)

Jeremiah warned the priests and the people not to listen to the false prophets who would say that the treasure would soon be returned to Jerusalem. He said:

Hearken not to the words of your prophets that prophesy unto you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the LORD'S house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. Hearken not unto them; serve the king of Babylon, and live: wherefore should this city be laid waste? (Jeremiah 27:16, 17)

Jeremiah warned the priests and the people that the treasure would not be returned, and that Nebuchadnezzar would return to Jerusalem to take the rest of the treasure, which he had left behind.

Not long after Jeremiah's prophecy, Hananiah, son of Azur the prophet, claimed to speak for God, and he told Jeremiah in the temple, and in the presence of the priest and the people, that God would break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, and would within two years would return the treasure and the exiles to Jerusalem. The Scriptures record Jeremiah's reply:

When the prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people that stood in the house of the LORD, Even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: the LORD do so: the LORD perform thy words which thou hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the LORD'S house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place. Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people; The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him. (Jeremiah 28:5-9)

Hananiah spoke good things to the people, and Jeremiah affirmed what he said, but only as a matter of wishful thinking, and not as a true prophecy from the Lord. Jeremiah said that a true prophet prophesies judgment upon the people for their sins, and calls them to repent. If he prophesies any good thing, that thing comes only after the people repent. There is a very simple test of a true prophet: if he claims to speak for God, and the thing he speaks does not come to pass, then he has not spoken for God, and is no true prophet. (Deuteronomy 18:22) However, a prophet might prophesy a thing, and prove it with a sign, but because his prophecy was contrary to the revealed will of God, his prophecy is false, and he is a false prophet. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3) Hananiah spoke to the people of restoration and prosperity. He did not, however, speak to them of repentance and judgment. He prophesied peace, but Jeremiah said that only time would tell whether Hananiah was a true or false prophet. Then Hananiah, as an illustration of his prophecy, broke the yoke from Jeremiah's neck, and repeated his prophecy that within two years God would break the yoke from the neck of all the nations. After Jeremiah went on his way, God

commanded him to tell Hanniah that, although he had broken yokes of wood, he would put on the nations yokes of iron, for they would serve Nebchadnezzar. So, Jeremiah said to Hananiah:

Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD. (Jeremiah 28:15, 16)

Two months later Hananiah was dead. Moreover, as Jeremiah had prophesied, King Nebuchadnezzar's army laid siege to the city of Jerusalem, and it fell into his hands. They plundered the temple, destroyed the city, and carried many of the people away to Babylon. (2 Kings 25:1-21) Jeremiah was a true prophet of the Lord. He did not tell the people what they wished to hear; he told them what God said. He called the people to repent, and he warned them of what would happen to them if they did not. Tragically, the people did not receive Jeremiah as a prophet, and so they came to their doom.

Before Jesus sent the apostles to preach the Gospel, He gave them instructions. He told them not to support themselves, but to rely upon the charity of the people they served. He warned them that some people would not help them, but rather persecute them. He told them that, in any city, if any house received them, then they should declare God's peace upon that house; if any would not receive them, then they should not declare peace. They should expect to be persecuted, and even be at odds with their own families. After all, Jesus said, if they called Him Beelzebub, they would surely say the same of His apostles. He told them not to fear men, who can harm only the body, but to fear God, who can destroy body and soul. He told them that He will affirm to God them that will suffer persecution for Him, but deny to God them that will not. He told them that if anyone would be His disciple, then he must love Him more than life itself. To be a worthy follower of Christ, one must be loyal to Him above others. After Jesus spoke of them that would not receive His disciples, He spoke of them that would. He said:

He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward. (Matthew 10:40-42)

Jesus was sent into the world by His Father. (John 3:17; 5:36; 17:18; John 20:21) He sent out His apostles in His name, which is to say, representing Him and having His authority. If anyone received one of Jesus's apostles, then He received Jesus, and, if He received Jesus, then he received Jesus's Father. If anyone received one of Jesus's apostles as such then he would be rewarded. If he showed hospitality to one of Jesus's apostles, then he would be rewarded. Here Jesus alludes to the episode of Elijah the prophet and the Shunammite woman. When Elijah the prophet traveled through the village of Shunem, a woman there showed him hospitality. She urged him to enter into her home and eat some bread, and he did. After that day, whenever he would pass through, he would visit her home, and have some bread. The woman, seeing that he was a man of God, had her husband make a room for him in which he could rest on his journey. One day, Elijah asked the woman what he could do to repay her kindness. She said that she had no child, and her husband was very old. Elijah told her that at that time in the following year she would have a son. She doubted, but it happened just as the prophet

said. She treated Elijah well because he was a prophet, and she was rewarded for her kindness. She was given the desire of her heart. So it would be for them that received Jesus's apostles: they were receiving Jesus Himself, and would be rewarded because they did so. And what is their reward? It is nothing less than eternal life.

After the Twelve returned, Jesus sent out seventy others. Before He did, He gave them instructions similar to those that He gave the Twelve, and He denounced the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, because they did not repent at His preaching. Then He said to the Seventy, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." (Luke 10:16)

To hear the apostles is to hear Jesus, and to hear Jesus is to hear the voice of God. The word of the apostles is the Word of God. Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians that the household of God is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." (Ephesians 2:20) There are no living apostles or prophets, but their words live on in the Scriptures, and everyone ought to listen to them. Saint Paul wrote to Saint Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16) Moreover, God has given to the Church faithful pastors who preach the Word of God, and teachers who teach it. (Ephesians 4:11) The Christian ought to listen to them, insofar as they are "rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

To receive the Word of God is not merely to hear it, however; to receive the Word of God is to hear it, and to obey it. Saint James wrote, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." (James 1:22) He explained that true Christian religion is to care for them that are in need. He wrote:

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? (James 2:14-16)

To be a Christian is to confess Jesus as Lord, and to be loyal to Him above all. It is to hear His words and to put them into practice. He said:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7:24-27)

Jesus in His Olivet discourse, He taught that the Final Judgement of men, the separation of the sheep and the goats, will be in accordance with what they have done. Jesus will judge men in accordance with how they have treated each other. How men have cared for each other is the proof of their faith in Jesus, and their love for Him. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matthew 25:40) Jesus will say to Christians who cared for each other, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:44) Tertullian, the Church Father, wrote of how Christians were known by their love one for another. He wrote:

But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves will sooner put to death. And they are wroth with us, too, because we call each other brethren; for no other reason, as I think, than because among themselves names of consanguinity are assumed in mere pretence of affection.” (Tertullian, *Apology*, XXXIX)

The Church Father Justin Martyr wrote about how in Christ all hostility between different groups of people came to an end. He wrote:

We who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies, and endeavour to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ, to the end that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all. (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 14)

Let us hear the Word of God, and not lies. Let us not only hear it, but also obey it. Let us love each other, and so prove ourselves true followers of Jesus.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.