

## **“Do You Live for Prophet or Profit?”**

Deuteronomy 18:14-19; John 1:19-28

*Series: Love Came Down: The Prophet*

The Rev. Douglas C. Hoglund

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We all use our cell phones a lot. It's a major crisis if you can't find it. But I still don't like the way cell phones invade our lives – interrupting family dinners, meetings, movies and most of all - sermons. I literally had a cell phone interrupt a funeral. The family and I both agreed it was from the dearly departed. I actually think cell phones are from the devil! I can prove it. The last digits of Pastor Doug's cell phone are 666.

Yet what if God had a cell phone? Wouldn't it be great to call or text the Lord day or night? Well Dutch artist Johan van der Dong decided to buy God a cell phone. He wanted to show God is available anywhere and anytime. Van der Dong said, “This is an opportunity to just make a phone call and say your prayer in a modern way.” How many people dialed God's number the first week? A 1000 callers. Yet when they called God's cell phone this is what they heard:

This is the voice of God. I am not able to speak to you at the moment, but please leave a message after the beep.<sup>1</sup>

When those callers looked to God for an answer all they received was a recording.

What are you looking for? All of us are looking for something. Toddlers are looking for a bottle and someone to change their diapers (Dads are looking for someone *else* to change the diaper). Students are looking for friends, for a place on the team, for a part in the play, college admission letters or a job. Young adults look for the right career, search for the right apartment, find that right person to date or marry. The unemployed look for work. The divorced or widowed may look for companionship. Companies look to stay afloat. The retired look for a safe place to keep their investments.

We are looking for answers. Sometimes we pray. Yet people also turn to prophets. From ancient history to modern times, prophets are like a cellphone from God. They deliver a message from the Almighty. They are God's mouthpiece. The word “Prophet” means to “speak for” someone.

Even today, in our increasingly secular society, we still seek prophets. Who are the prophets of today? There are the commentators on CNN or FOX News, advertisers, politicians and the legion of feel-good gurus. The top influencers according to one AI source are: 1. MrBeast 2. Khaby Lame 3. Charli D'Amelio 4. Jake Paul and Logan Paul. They tell us what to buy, what to wear, what to think, how to live. The message many of these prophets preach is “Do what profits you.” It's essentially a self-help, self-centered, selfish message. Whatever profits you.

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<sup>1</sup> Reuters, "Leave God a message at his Dutch answering service," [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com) (3-2-09).

Do you live for profit? It might be financial profit, emotional profit, achievement profit, power profit, pleasure profit. If we are honest, we all live for one profit or another. We want a person, place or thing, an award, a goal, a raise, a degree, recognition, approval. We want to get ahead, get more, get what we deserve, get it before it's gone. Today's prophets tell us how to live for profit, how to get what we want.

More and more people are even turning to psychic prophets – mediums, tarot card readers, fortune tellers. In the Bible, God tells us to **Avoid False Prophets**. Just before the Israelites enter the Promised Land, Moses tells them:

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord; because of these same detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. Deuteronomy 18:9-13

Why is God against mediums? Fortune tellers are a way to go around God to get the information we want. It's proof that we don't trust the Lord. These occult practices open a door and allow demonic influences to enter. They are not just harmless fun. It's playing with poison. One member of Woodside gave me permission to share this story with you.

In 1989 my family suffered a devastating loss when my sister was killed riding in the car of a drunk driver. She was 30 years old. She wasn't married and didn't have a family of her own...those dreams were now gone. In the terrible grief that engulfed my family in the months after her death we were consumed with questions. Why did she have to die when the driver walked away from the accident? His blood alcohol level was three times the legal limit. Why did she get into the car?

I wasn't a Christian. I didn't understand God's great love for us and His gift of Grace. So I turned to other spiritual avenues for answers. I poured over James Van Praagh's book, *Talking to Heaven: A Medium's Message of Life After Death*. I meditated on her memory hoping she would send me a vision or communicate to me in my dreams. I wanted answers.

In 1994 I came to faith in Christ. And it was then I realized I was seeking answers from a spiritual source apart from God. I was second guessing God's plan for my life. In this life there will always be questions we will never be able to answer. Faith for me is finding peace even though I don't know the answers and trusting God until He makes those answers known to me. Now I turn to the only spiritual source we should be seeking: God.

Were you ever involved with the occult? Even if it's been years, even if you thought it was just for fun, it's important to recognize this, renounce it and ask God for deliverance and healing. How do we do that?

**Listen to the True Prophet.** Moses goes on to say,

The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." The Lord said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. Deuteronomy 18:14-18

God does not need a cell phone. God has always been speaking through His chosen prophets. Starting with Moses, God raised up one prophet after another to guide His people. There was Elijah and Elisha, Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, Micah and Malachi. They criticized the powerful and warned the people. They were not in it for profit and many of them paid for their prophecies with their lives. At the same time, there were plenty of other prophets who were "Yes Men," who told the king and the people what they wanted to hear, who promised great profits for everyone. Why don't you hear about them? They were wrong. They did not speak for God. They led people astray into selfishness and, eventually, captivity.

But God did not give up on His people. The true prophets predicted God would one day send THE Prophet - a Prophet like Moses. The Word of God will come out of His mouth. He will lead them out of captivity as Moses did. He will give them God's Word as Moses did. He will bring them to the Promised Land as Moses did.

For seven centuries, through wars and exile, captivity and return, the people waited for the arrival of the Prophet like Moses. Then a prophet appeared. He dressed like Elijah and stood on the bank of the Jordan River. His name was John. The people thought John was The Prophet. The officials sent a commission to investigate him.

Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah." They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" John 1:19-23

This would have been a perfect time for John to promote himself and say, "Of course I am the Prophet." Instead, he pointed to someone else still to come. John prepared the way for the Lord. He didn't have to wait long.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself

did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” John 1:29-31

How do we know Jesus is THE Prophet we must follow?

- Earthly prophets tell us what we want to hear. This Prophet tells us what we need to hear.
- Earthly prophets preach a self-centered message. This Prophet preaches sacrifice and lays down His life.
- Earthly prophets give you rules to follow or seven easy steps to success. This Prophet gives grace because He knows we are helpless and powerless to save ourselves.
- Earthly prophets come and go. This Prophet was the fulfillment of century old prophecies and two thousand years later He is still changing lives.

And above all – Jesus is THE Prophet because He is not *just* a prophet. He is more than a prophet. Today, it is popular for people to say Jesus is just a prophet, one of history’s many religious leaders. They say He is perhaps the wisest man that ever lived, but He is not the Son of God. Unfortunately, that is not logical. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and the Savior of the World. John described Him as “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The Prophet who came was God Himself. God’s Word came from the Word of God. Love came down so we can live forever.

Bono from the rock group U2 is also a follower of Jesus. Reporters asked if it’s farfetched to believe Jesus is more than a prophet, that He is God Incarnate. He replied, No, it’s not farfetched to me. Look, the secular response to the Christ story always goes like this: he was a great prophet, obviously a very interesting guy, had a lot to say along the lines of other great prophets, be they Elijah, Muhammad, Buddha, or Confucius. But actually Christ doesn’t allow you that. He doesn’t let you off that hook. Christ says: No. I’m not saying I’m a teacher. Don’t call me teacher. I’m not saying I’m a prophet. I’m saying: “I’m the Messiah.” I’m saying: “I am God incarnate.” And people say: No, no, please, just be a prophet. A prophet, we can take. So what you’re left with is: either Christ was who he said he was—the Messiah—or a complete nutcase. The idea that the entire course of civilization for over half of the globe could have its fate changed and turned upside-down by a nutcase, for me, that’s farfetched.<sup>2</sup>

As Bono once sang, this Prophet came in the name of love. He didn’t come to tell us how to make a profit. He came in love to save us.

So how do we **Live by the True Prophet**? Don’t just listen, do what He says in every area of your life. If you’ve never given your life to Jesus, open the door and let Him in. If you do believe in Him, let Him into every part of your life. Maybe you allow Him to have your Sunday but not Monday to Friday. He may be Lord of your home life but not your school or work life. He might be in your heart, but not your head, in your beliefs but not your finances, your entertainment, your attitudes. John the Baptist said, “He must become greater; I must become less.” (John 3:30) John was not preaching for popularity or profit. He followed THE Prophet. As he decreased, Jesus increased. Less room for selfishness means more room for the Savior. Less my will, more Thy will.

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<sup>2</sup> Michka Assayas, Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas (Riverhead Books, 2005).

As we head into Advent and Christmas, make it your goal to have less of self and more of the Savior, less profit and more Prophet. Prepare the way for others to receive Jesus by inviting them to worship or your Growth Group. In the New Year join us for Cliff Notes on the Bible. You'll get to know and grasp the Word of God. If God used a cell phone He'd say: Follow the Prophet not the prophets of this world.

By all accounts, Kirsten Powers was one of those prophets. As a host of CNN and Fox News she had a powerful and influential position. She was also an atheist, and just fine with that. Her life seemed wonderful and full of opportunities.

After college I worked as an appointee in the Clinton administration from 1992 to 1998. The White House surrounded me with intellectual people who, if they had any deep faith in God, never expressed it. Later, when I moved to New York, where I worked in Democratic politics, my world became aggressively secular. My group of friends was overwhelmingly atheist.

She served as the press secretary for a number of high profile Democratic candidates. Whenever she encountered Christians inevitably they said things that opposed her political views. She tried to avoid them as much as possible.

I didn't feel I was missing much. So when I began dating a man who was into Jesus, I was not looking for God. In fact, the week before I met him, a friend had asked me if I had any deal breakers in dating. My response: 'Just nobody who is religious.'

I derided Christians as anti-intellectual bigots who were too weak to face the reality that there is no rhyme or reason to the world. I had found this man's church attendance an oddity to overlook, not a point in his favor.

As he talked, I grew conflicted. On the one hand, I was creeped out. On the other hand, I had enormous respect for him. He is smart, educated, and intellectually curious. I remember thinking, What if this is true, and I'm not even willing to consider it?

Her boyfriend encouraged her to have an open mind. So she tried it. She listened to Tim Keller pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York. His message was

...intellectually rigorous, weaving in art and history and philosophy. I decided to come back to hear him again. Soon, hearing Keller speak on Sunday became the highlight of my week. Each week, Keller made the case for Christianity. He also made the case against atheism and agnosticism. He expertly exposed the intellectual weaknesses of a purely secular worldview. I came to realize that even if Christianity wasn't the real thing, neither was atheism.

She eventually came to believe, intellectually, that Christianity was right.

Then one night on a trip to Taiwan, I woke up in what felt like a strange cross between a dream and reality. Jesus came to me and said, 'Here I am.' It felt so real. I didn't know what to make of it. I called my boyfriend, but before I had time to tell him about

it, he told me he had been praying the night before and felt we were supposed to break up. So we did. Honestly, while I was upset, I was more traumatized by Jesus visiting me. It's true. It's completely true. Everywhere I turned, there was God. Slowly there was less fear and more joy. The world looked entirely different, like a veil had been lifted off it. I had not an iota of doubt. I was filled with indescribable joy.

God doesn't need a cell phone. He's calling you. Will you answer? Will you follow?