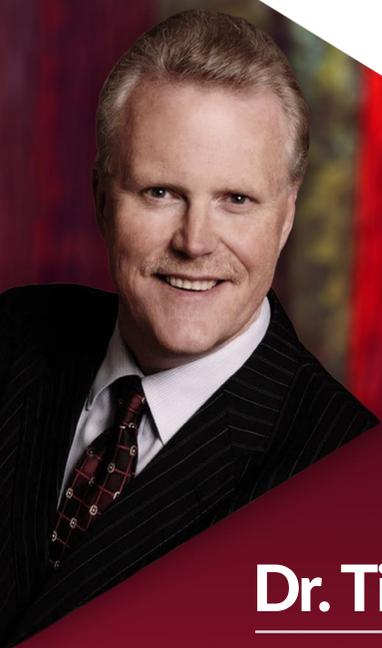


Broom Trees, Caves

And The **Real Truth**

Let's Talk About It

A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM THE DESK OF THE
GENERAL OVERSEER



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BROOM TREES AND CAVES

After leaving the limited shade of a broom tree and while sitting inside a cave, Elijah began to complain to God - "I am the only one left in Israel to serve you." In his closed and isolated world of depression, following one of his greatest victories at Mount Carmel, Elijah felt as if the whole world was lost and there was no reason to try anymore.

As a pastor, I often counseled the discouraged to go visit hospitals and nursing homes. The suggestion was certainly not to spread their discouraged demeanor and pessimism to others, but rather to help them gain a healthier and more realistic perspective on reality. More than once, I've had those discouraged souls come back and affirm that their life wasn't nearly as bad as they first thought, and they were now ready to move forward and help others.

Similarly, I would encourage anyone who has a tendency to become disillusioned and disappointed by isolated and localized circumstances to adopt a broader view of what God is doing globally. It is easy to walk away from a Sunday service that didn't quite live up to your expectation of Pentecostal worship and verbally generalize that the entire church is backslid and needs revival. Granted, there will always be the capacity in any church - or individual - for more of God's presence, power and purpose. However, one should never rush to assume that "here" defines "there," or "this" defines "that."

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"I SAY THIS IN LOVE"

We have all experienced our share of conversations, or verbal whippings, that began with "I say this in love." These conversations often occurred after deeply moving services when someone felt the revelatory responsibility to unload their words of advice

on the pastor. I have sat through my share of those verbal assaults and have concluded that most of the time, I was the recipient of somebody's pent-up frustrations over marriage, home or work issues that couldn't be vented to anyone else or in any other way. Most of the time, the person draped their personal issues in a spiritual cloak and began spewing negative and doomsday prophecy all over my office. Usually they left feeling better - but left me ready to resign.

As expected, the moon never turned blood-red, the sky didn't fill with locusts and flies, and the church didn't split. Invariably the next time I saw the self-proclaimed "prophet" in church, he was smiling and sitting closer to his wife than normal and ready to move on to his next crucial assignment of foretelling doom, usually at another church across town.

THE SPIRIT OF A PROPHET

Recently there seems to be a new, self-imposed anointing to embrace the spirit of this prophet or that prophet, and to use that "anointing" to rake the church over the coals about one thing or another. Before anyone prays to be so ordained with any resemblance of prophets such as Elijah, Ezekiel or even John the Baptist, you may want to consider a few things.

While Elijah, Ezekiel and John were all known as unique fire-brands who spoke directly, dressed uniquely, and could call judgment down from Heaven in a split second, they were also blessed with repentant hearts, striking humility, and indescribable wisdom.

While Elijah, Ezekiel and John were all known as unique fire-brands who spoke directly, dressed uniquely, and could call judgment down from Heaven in a split second, they were also blessed with repentant hearts, striking humility, and indescribable wisdom. Wisdom that weighed every word for immediate attention. Wisdom that embraced impeccable timing for maximum effect. And wisdom that incubated

the new-born revelation for eventual and effective delivery - so that when prophetic utterance finally did come forth, it shook earthly kingdoms.

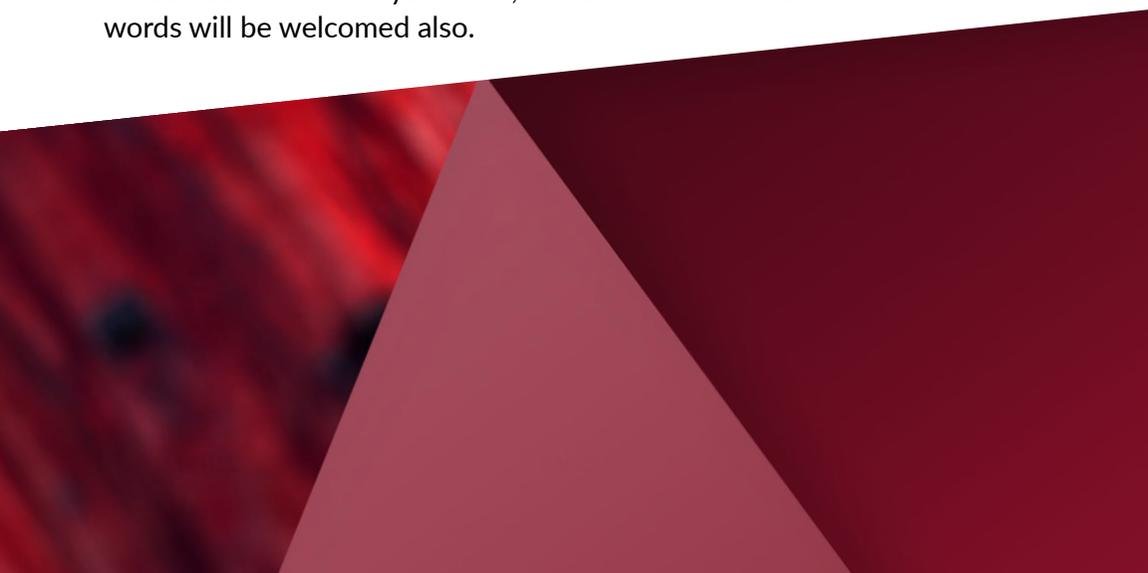
It's stunning and enlightening to read the responses of Isaiah, Ezekiel and John the Baptist after a divine visitation and receiving words of revelation.

When Isaiah saw the Lord, he responded with the words, "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips." (Isaiah 6:5)

Ezekiel's own actions of lying on his side for a total of 430 days, and shaving his head, upon which he put cow waste and ashes, is proof of his own victory over pride and arrogance. (Ezekiel 4:4-5)

And John the Baptist declared his own unworthiness in comparison to the greatness and supremacy of Christ and didn't even consider himself qualified to unlatch the sandals on Jesus' feet. His choice of a wardrobe made of camel's hair was not an "in your face" show of resistance to tradition. It was all that the poor man could afford on a wilderness budget, and it spoke volumes about his self-denial and self-sacrifice. (John 1:27)

Please don't misunderstand. My door is always open to someone who has sincerely heard from the Lord, whether they have a word of warning or a word of correction. Just in the last few weeks, I've heard from three different individuals who told me that they have had dreams they believe relate to the church. The persons trembled in humility, wept, and sincerely deposited strong words into my spirit. Their words were welcomed. In the days ahead, others who have similar words will be welcomed also.



However, I hope before visiting, calling, or carelessly broadcasting a negative forecast against any work of the Lord, the person will do some very important preliminary work. It is important to invest in some prayerful research before assumptions are made that God is not moving in the church anymore and that the days of revival are over.

THE REAL TRUTH

I would encourage you to start at the Church of God International Offices. Sit in on a Wednesday morning prayer meeting with Senior Adults from across the region. Join in on our prayer walks with Doug Small every three months as work shuts down and leaders and staff meet with people from all over North America to pray in the offices and hallways. In January, visit our “Agree” meetings when everything stops for three days for prayer, fasting, and seeking the will of the Lord.

Whatever you do, don’t miss a Winterfest gathering or a state-sponsored Youth Camp. You will be able to observe thousands of students calling on the Lord in their own unique way, as their passion shows the depths of their sincere desperation to know Jesus.

If you take my challenge, be sure to drop a donation off at Operation Compassion, as well as Men and Women of Action, organizations who have worked 24/7 to get product, people and supplies to decimated regions recently affected by hurricanes, fires, floods and earthquakes.

And don’t underestimate or miss World Missions. You need to hear about the prayer movement in Indonesia that involves over three (3) million people. You also must hear about the church planting phenomenon throughout Latin America and Africa that has birthed over 10,000 new Church of God congregations in recent years.

And lives are being changed eternally. So, make sure to factor into your evaluation the fact that almost 600,000 people encountered Jesus and his Holy Spirit in Church of God altars last year alone.

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One last thing. Check in with a State Overseer and ask him what he has seen lately in his state. You'll likely hear of statewide prayer and fasting emphases that precedes most conferences and Camp Meetings. Don't discount the impact of those. Maybe he'll tell you that the state has adopted Amsterdam, Paris, Bangkok, Manila or Moscow in an effort to take the Gospel of Jesus to major cities and reach a vast harvest. I'm sure he'll tell you that the women in his state are helping to build a school and home for children in the country of Columbia to get girls and boys off the street and into a secure environment.

CONCLUSION

Bottom Line?

There is no doubt that the church can always do better - and more. Remember that the book of Revelation shows us that it took only 60 years from Pentecost for Jesus to be standing outside his own church knocking on the door, asking to be allowed back in. (Revelation 3:20) He regularly must get our attention and He usually does. It is His church and He has the right to chastise and correct it. When He does correct it, He does so with a broken heart. Always.

On the other hand, He rejoices in the obedience, triumphs and accomplishments of His church. I believe He finds great joy in our reaping of the harvest. He takes delight in our passion for helping the hurting. He smiles, and maybe even laughs, at the joy we express when we worship Him like small children adoring their father.

Please understand that I recognize that God is a judge and judgment is very real. He doesn't wink at sin, nor does He endlessly endure our compromise with evil. But I assure you, God isn't nearly as mad at us as some preachers and prophets are.

So, my advice to those who think they are operating in the spirit of John, Ezekiel, Elijah and a dozen more?

***Fix your eyes totally on Jesus and get them off others.
Love the lost and seek to be like Jesus...***

Fix your eyes totally on Jesus and get them off others. Love the lost and seek to be like Jesus, not John the Baptist, Ezekiel or Elijah. When you do, you'll operate in His Spirit and it will make all the difference in, and to, the world.

Remember these words - "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." John 13:35

And yes, that even includes prophets!!

Tim Hill

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