

# A PROPHET IN CAMEL HAIR

BY: REV. R.C. SPROUL, JR., © 2003

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To whom are we to speak our prophecies? The pattern in the Bible seems pretty clear. For every one time a prophet is sent to give warning to the heathen, ten times that prophet is sent to warn the children of Israel. The wicked, more often than not, are left to wallow in their ignorance. It is the righteous who are commanded to repent and keep covenant. Judgment, after all, begins in the house of God. Our focus ought to be on the sins within the walls of the church. Before we start boycotting Disney, we ought to be boycotting the PCUSA. Before we start complaining about the inanities that come through the television, we must deal with the inanities coming from our pulpits. We need, as we have argued before, to be about the business of tending our own garden. That most of the time the prophets spoke to God's people, however, is not at all the same thing as all the time. That we should major on ourselves doesn't mean we never speak outside our own walls.

John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets, (that is, he ministered before the beginning of the earthly ministry of Jesus) and the greatest, Jesus tells us. His message was certainly more significant than the messages of those who preceded him. He was not merely bringing a particular suit against the children of Israel. Instead he was to prepare the way of the Lord. This he did most of all in calling the children of Israel to repentance. Out there by the Jordan he was busy letting those who thought they were well know that they were sick indeed. And, the Bible tells us, all Israel went out to hear him.

John was not, however, a one note wonder. He didn't find himself in trouble with the local authorities for telling Jews to repent. John became a martyr because he prophesied to the king. He told the king of his sin in marrying his brother's wife, and before long John was dead.

We, of course, no longer prophesy to the king. We will wail against the culture in general, calling it to task for assorted social ills. We'll fuss at Disney World, or Hollywood, but not at the king. It's not as though what has changed is the behavior of our kings. We have recently had a king who didn't take his brother's wife into his bed, but a father's daughter into secret hallways. We more recently have a king who courted the favor of the church, only to determine to finance experiments on the remains of unborn babies. There is plenty to prophesy against. But by and large, we have been silent.

There's a reason for that. The American church has exchanged the mantle of the prophet for the alms bowl of the beggar. Herod has cut a deal with the church. He has promised that He will give the church all the protections afforded a corporation, and in exchange the church has promised not to call him to repentance. But wait, there's more. Herod has also promised that, in exchange for putting on the gag, he would promise to oversee the church, that if it should fail to serve the state's purposes, he will take it over. Isn't that nice? Who would even want to prophesy against such benevolence?

It would be bad enough if the church signed onto this deal in exchange for tax advantages. It is true that donations given to 501c-3 corporations are tax deductible. But it is also true that donations given to churches are tax deductible. That is, no church needs to be a 501c-3 in order to get the tax benefits. Granted, Herod doesn't tend to advertise this fact, but it is true nevertheless. (For more information I encourage you to check out Peter Kershaw's website, <http://hushmoney.org>).

When the church asks the state to recognize it as a corporation, legally, whether it intends to or not, it contractually affirms that it is subservient to the state, its maker. Objections after the fact are useless. The

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state understands well that the clay cannot say to the potter, “why have you made me thus?”. And so the church has instead chosen its 501c-3 pottage. What we gave up was not only our birthright, but that which we need in order to create still more births, our manhood.

John the Baptist knew better than to make a deal with the King. He asked for no quarter, because he knew that he could give none. He knew better to make a deal with Herod because he knew that the true King was coming. He knew that he could serve only one master. He knew who would establish the church. For that knowledge he lost his head. For that knowledge, he had the honor of martyrdom.

Is our calling any less? If we conclude only that John the Baptist was special, that he was a man of courage, are we not then concluding, to our everlasting shame, that we are cowards, that we are not men at all? And didn't Jesus Himself say that “he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11)? We who live on this side of the cross, we who have heard the promise of Christ that He has already overcome the world, must we not then be bolder still than this great prophet? We who know and love and are loved by the King of Kings, why should we fear those kings?

Those who have silenced themselves by cutting this deal with the government, I know, often have no idea that such is what they have done. Churches most often incorporate out of ignorance rather than wickedness. But that ignorance is culpable. And it must not be invincible. Before the church can rise up and call the state to task for failing to kiss the Son, the church must stop kissing the beast.

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