

“God’s Word Has Authority”

Ephesians 1:3-14

Last week, after Bible class, I was asked an interesting question. I was asked, “in OT times, how did the people know that the prophets of God were really speaking from God and how could the people tell if a false prophet was false? And I made a reference to Amos calling out Hananiah as a false prophet and supporter of the Gospel of Prosperity. What I meant was that Amos called out Amaziah (Hananiah was one of the false prophets called out by Jeremiah). There are too many “iah’s” to remember. I would like to think that doesn’t make me a false teacher.

Amaziah, like Hananiah, was proclaiming that all is well and that everything will go well and life will be great because God always makes life smooth for those who truly love him. (He was sort of the Joel Osteen of his day). And Amaziah tells Amos to get out of Israel, go back to Judah and quit saying Israel is doomed.

How do you know that Amos is the real prophet and that Amaziah was speaking false things? For us it is easy, because we see that Amos’ words, his prophecies, came to fruition. What he said was going to happen is what actually happened. But what about the people who are living at that time?

This is one of the interesting and inciteful things that I am gleaning out of my study in preparation for teaching our Bible class on Zechariah. Zechariah begins his writing by pointing back to the words and work of earlier prophets –

those who have been shown to be authoritatively from God. He makes numerous references to them – particularly he often makes references to the words of Jeremiah. In the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah speaks with authority from God and five times speaks of “My prophets” in a positive sense. Thirty-five times he speaks of “your prophets” in a negative sense. Clearly, there were false teachers running around back then.

It still begs the question: How do you know what is currently being spoken by a prophet (or a pastor for that matter) is authoritatively from God? Scripture answers this question: in Deuteronomy 4, the Lord says, “You shall not add to the Word that I command you, nor take from it.” And Scripture basically closes with the words of Jesus from Revelation 22: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life.”

How do you recognize a true prophet or a false prophet? Is what he says in agreement with what God has spoken with authority in the past? Does he add to or take away from that which God has declared to be true. The credibility of my preaching is not based upon my vocabulary or wordsmithing. The words spoken from this pulpit only have value if they are drawn from and coincide with the authoritative Word of God.

Zechariah makes multiple references to the authoritative words of Jeremiah who lived about 200 years earlier, and he warns them: “Do not be like your fathers.” Do not be like Hananiah who rejected the words of Jeremiah because Hananiah had ultimately rejected God’s Covenant.

That was the sin of Israel in general and of Amaziah in particular against whom Amos preaches. Amos was only saying what God had already proclaimed

would be the result of breaking His covenant. Amaziah had set up an alternative temple at Bethel. After all, Bethel means “House of God.” It was given that name by Jacob himself. What could be wrong with that? Well, the Ark of the Covenant, the Mercy Seat of God, the House of God, the Temple which actually was the place (and the only place) which God said bears His Name – those are all in Jerusalem. And God has emphatically commanded that sacrifices and offerings were not to be made on other altars.

Whatever Amaziah and those living under the rule of Jeroboam were doing in the Name of God, their sin is that they had neglected and had ultimately forgotten the covenant. They were speaking and doing whatever they pleased and acting as their own authority. As Luther says in the last paragraph in the insert in your bulletin, “the people do not repent of the sin or acknowledge it; rather they boast of it and rely upon it as though it were a good deed, as false saints always do. For a sin cannot become more grave, great, or weighty than when it tries to be a holy and godly work, making the devil God and God the devil.”

If you want to recognize a false teacher, you have to know if the words being spoken have been drawn from God’s authoritative Word, or is the person adding to or taking away from what God has said is the truth. Therefore, it is imperative that we are rooted in God’s Word. Shallow faith and a superficial understanding of the mysteries of God is a recipe for a short-lived faith. If faith has no root, it may spring up quickly, but if there is any trouble or persecution, as Jesus says, the person quickly falls away.

Having sound doctrine matters. As we have recently celebrated the anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession on June 25, 1530, it brings me comfort in my faith and confidence in my preaching that Confessional

Lutherans are the only group of Christians who have not made significant changes to their doctrine over the past almost 500 years (and that includes some church bodies who have only been around a relatively short while). What was taught by the Lutherans in the 1500's are the same words that I confessed to uphold 26 years ago when I was ordained, or 12 years ago when I was installed as your pastor.

We are blessed to be a part of a Confessional Lutheran church body where catechetical instruction takes place and doctrinal standards are upheld – even if what Scripture says is not popular with the modern world. God's Word has authority.

It is not through clever arguments that you have been convinced to come here this evening/morning. It is because the seed of God's Word has been planted in you by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses Word and Sacrament as the way He comes to you. We call them His Means of Grace. We then carry what God has given us out to those whom He has placed in our path. The Gospel is effectively disseminated in the world by the words and actions of ordinary people like you and me, and we can do so with confidence as it is by His authority, not our personal authority, that these words have meaning and truth.

Have confidence in the Word spoken and confessed here today. Feed on His Word throughout the week. As Paul says, "He lavished upon us . . . all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will." And through this glorious grace found in His Word of authority, we have been adopted through Jesus Christ and we have been redeemed through His blood. Amen.