

“Our Need for Prophets”
2 Samuel 12:1-15a
January 17, 2021
Faith Presbyterian Church – Evening Service
Pastor Nicoletti

We come to Second Samuel chapter twelve tonight. It’s been a few weeks since we were in chapter eleven, so a little review will be important.

In chapter eleven of Second Samuel we have the moral fall of David. And it’s serious.

First, David commits adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of his faithful soldier Uriah. Then, when he learns that Bathsheba is pregnant, David tries to bring Uriah home to be with Bathsheba, in order to deceive Uriah into thinking the baby was his. When that doesn’t work, David decides to have Uriah murdered. And when his plan for murder is seen by Joab as having too many loose ends, David accepts, without batting an eye, Joab’s revised plan, which includes the death of several other innocent soldiers of David, in order to better cover up the murder of Uriah.

David’s fall is hard. And the Lord – Yahweh – is displeased.

And then we come to our text this evening: Second Samuel 12:1-15.

Please listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this evening:

^{12:1} And the LORD [Yahweh] sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had very many flocks and herds, ³but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.” ⁵Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As Yahweh lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, ⁶and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”

⁷Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. ⁸And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. ⁹Why have you despised the word of Yahweh, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ ¹¹Thus says Yahweh, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹²For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’” ¹³David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against Yahweh.” And Nathan said to David, “Yahweh also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned Yahweh, the child who is born to you shall die.” ¹⁵Then Nathan went to his house.

This is the Word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

Let's pray ...

Lord,
Let your saving hand be close to us,
for we have bound ourselves to your precepts.
We long for your salvation, Lord,
because your law is our delight.
Give our souls life, that we might praise you,
and help us now through your word.
We have each gone astray like lost sheep.
As we come to your word now, we ask you to seek us.
For we have not forgotten your word to us.
Grant this, we ask, in Jesus's name. Amen.
[Based on Psalm 119:173-176]

INTRODUCTION

There is a lot going on in Second Samuel 12, and so we will take several sermons to unpack it. In future sermons we will discuss the nature of David's repentance, as well as the results of David's sins.

Tonight, my goal is much more modest. I want us to consider the significance of one thing only: the fact that David listened to Nathan.

David listened to Nathan.

Because everything else will hinge on that.

SAUL VS DAVID

And the significance of that becomes clear when we consider Saul – the first king of Israel, before David. Because unlike David, Saul did not listen to prophetic confrontation.

And the comparison is pretty striking, in large part because David's sin is so much worse.

In Second Samuel 11, David commits adultery and then orders a murder resulting in multiple homicides.

In the initial fall of Saul, found in First Samuel 13, Saul goes against the prophet Samuel's instructions to wait for him before offering sacrifice to the Lord.

Why then, does Saul's path end in ruin, while David is forgiven?

Because David listens to the voice of the prophet that the Lord sends him, and Saul does not. Saul will not hear. Saul immediately starts making excuses. He immediately starts justifying himself. And that sets him on a trajectory to ruin.

David listens to the prophetic confrontation, and Saul does not.

And tonight we need to consider what that means for us.

WHAT ARE PROPHETS FOR?

But before we can even answer that question, we first need to consider what prophets are for.

What is at the heart of the role of a prophet?

We tend to think of their main role as making predictions about the future, and giving God's people new revelation from the Lord. And that is part of their role in the Scriptures – that is true.

But actually, as we go more deeply, as we consider the ministry of the prophets as a whole, we soon see that prediction and revelation are not the heart of the prophetic ministry – but actually just tools of it. They are not the goal.

The goal, the purpose, the heart of the ministry of a prophet, is that they are, as Dr. Mike Williams of Covenant Seminary has put it, God's covenant enforcers. They are God's covenant enforcers. [Williams, 191]

What does that mean?

Well, their purpose is to go to God's people and to call them to be faithful to their covenant with God. God's relationship to his people takes the form of a covenant: a formal relationship of love, with obligations for both parties. God binds himself to his people, and makes promises about how he will care for them. God also issues obligations to his people, which they agree to follow in faithfulness to him.

God sends prophets to his people when they are failing to keep his law – the obligations he has given them – and through the ministry of prophets, God calls his people back to faithfulness. God also sends prophets to his people when they are doubting his promises, to assure them that he will be faithful and keep the promises he has made.

Calling God's people to obey his commands, calling God's people to believe God's promises: That is the heart of the prophetic ministry.

PROPHETIC VOICES AND US

What, then, does that mean for us?

It means that while God's people no longer have a prophetic office, and while God is giving no new revelations, the fact remains that God still sends us prophetic voices through his people.

God still sends us people whom he desires to use to call us back to faithfulness where we have gone astray. They may not have a special revelation from God; they may not have a new vision of the future for us; but God continues to use other people to confront us about where we have been unfaithful to his callings on us, or where we have failed to believe what is true. He still uses others to confront us about where we are wrong in our hearts, in our minds, or in our actions.

And the range of things God may confront us on is as wide today as it was in the days of the Scriptures.

God confronts his people over personal sin. God confronts his people over false worship. God confronts his people over false beliefs. And as we see in the books of Amos and Micah, God confronts his people over social injustice and oppression.

God's law applies to all of life, and so God will send prophetic voices to confront his people in every area of life. We should expect no less.

God will send his people prophetic voices – voices that call us to repentance. That's not the question.

The question is: When they come, will we listen?

A HISTORY OF RESISTANCE TO PROPHETIC VOICES

Because, if you know the Bible, then you know that God's people have a history of not listening. Saul was not unique in that.

Again and again in the Old Testament Israel ignores and attacks the prophets God sends them. Every time it ends in disaster for them.

The pattern continues in the New Testament as well, as the people persecute the preachers and Apostles that the Lord sends to them.

And that pattern didn't end in the days of the Bible. The people of God have often resisted the prophetic voices God sends them. The Church resists such voices. And when it does, the result is always spiritual downfall.

A few weeks ago I mentioned the fall of Carl Lentz, a well-known Hillsong pastor in New York, who was recently fired for an extended affair, among other things.

Lentz seemed to have cultivated a pattern of life that silenced or insulated him from the kind of prophetic voices that might have confronted him before things got as bad as they did.

Now ... Hillsong is pretty different from us. And so we can be tempted to assume that this is more of a problem "out there" than it is in our circles.

But in a recent article David French points out that we cannot get off that easy.

Regarding Lentz, French writes:

“It would be a profound mistake to quickly connect Lentz’s sin to his church’s less-orthodox style. In recent months and years, it seems as if every single major branch of Evangelical Christianity has watched a famous leader fall.

“Are straight-laced fundamentalist homeschoolers immune from scandal? Not at all. Bill Gothard, a man who could once fill arenas with followers, faced dozens of allegations of sexual misconduct and was ultimately forced out of the ministry he founded. And Gothard is hardly the only fundamentalist leader to quit his ministry in shame.

“What about rock-ribbed Southern Baptists? We’re mere months removed from Jerry Falwell Jr.’s departure from Liberty University in a cloud of sexual scandal.” [French, “The Crisis of Christian Celebrity”]

And in each case, the fall involved a Christian celebrity who had insulated themselves from challenge – from any prophetic call to repent.

Ok, we might say, still – those leaders are not like us. They’re not really from our tribe. Our tribe is different.

Which brings us to Ravi Zacharias.

A quick search of our website reveals that Ravi Zacharias has been cited and referenced multiple times in our teaching and preaching here. In 2016 we had an apologist from Ravi Zacharias International Ministries come out and speak at our Men of Faith Oktoberfest. We have spoken highly of Ravi Zacharias’s books, and many of you have read them.

Ravi Zacharias *is* one of our people.

But after his death in May, new information about Zacharias’s life began to emerge.

And in September, *Christianity Today* published a lengthy and detailed account of their own investigation, which focused on three women who worked at day spas co-owned by Zacharias – spas which Zacharias often visited 2 to 3 times a week.

The article explains:

“Zacharias was kind and took interest in their lives, according to the people who worked there. But over time, in the small private treatment rooms, Zacharias would make unwanted sexual advances, the three women each said independently. At first, they tried to ignore it, too embarrassed to call out a famous Christian minister. By their accounts, his inappropriate behavior only escalated.”

The *Christianity Today* report then goes into detail on that escalation. I won’t this evening. But it is disturbing.

After an initial denial of the allegations, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries agreeing to hire a law firm to do an internal investigation.

On December 23rd, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries released the interim report. It was not good.

As investigators combined information from interviews with documents and electronic data made available to them, they write: “we have found significant, credible evidence that Mr. Zacharias engaged in sexual misconduct over the course of many years. Some of that misconduct is consistent with and corroborative of that which is reported in the news recently, and some of the conduct we have uncovered is more serious.”

Ravi Zacharias International Ministries has promised to release the full report when it was completed, sometime in the next few weeks.

How does such a thing happen? And not once, but over the course of years?

Well, the women said they were afraid to speak out because they thought they would not be believed. And the fact that, when these allegations first came to light, the first response of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries was to deny them, would seem to confirm the women’s fears. That along with the fact that when another woman did come forward with similar allegations in 2017, Zacharias sued her and her husband, convinced them to sign a non-disclosure agreement, and then the ministry put out a statement presenting only Zacharias’s side of the story.

As David French points out, the same pattern emerges here as with Falwell and Lentz. He writes: “These powerful men were coddled and enabled by other powerful men and then automatically and reflexively defended by thousands upon thousands of angry and loyal Christian followers until the evidence of their malfeasance was open and irrefutable.” [French, “The Church Needs Prophets.”]

In other words, these men made themselves prophet-resistant. They, and many of their followers, buffered themselves from any prophetic confrontation, and only really listened when the evidence was so obvious, and so out in the open, that they had no other choice.

God’s people have a history of silencing prophetic voices. It ends in spiritual disaster. And we are not immune. We all too often work – consciously or unconsciously – to make ourselves prophet-resistant.

NAÏVE VS WISE HEARING

We are going to talk about how we do that.

But before we do, we should address two likely objections up-front.

The first has to do with accuracy. “Well,” you might say, “it’s all well and good to cherry-pick examples where the prophetic voice was right. But there are false prophets. And there are false accusers in the world. We can’t just believe every criticism that comes our way.”

And of course that is true. But neither I nor the Scriptures ever asked you to do that.

My aim this evening is very modest. I'm looking at one thing. David *heard* the prophetic confrontation. He really heard it. By which I mean that he listened, and then he really considered it, and weighed it in his heart and mind. He took it seriously.

But our tendency is to not even get to that point. We don't even consider most prophetic critiques. We build patterns into our lives so that we can discard a prophetic critique without ever *really* hearing it – without ever taking it seriously and really weighing it in our hearts.

So what I am urging us to do tonight is not to naively accept every criticism we receive – not at all. And that point is especially important for those of you with a more sensitive conscience. The point is not believing every criticism. The point is at least hearing it, and evaluating it with thoughtful wisdom.

Another likely objection is: “Well, you are assuming that these critics have our best interest in mind. Many of them don't. Many of them hate us. Many of them have evil intentions. Or, even if their intentions are not bad, they are demonstrably foolish in other areas of life. What about that?”

As for whether those confronting us are foolish, it is always good to remember Balaam's donkey. In Numbers 22, Balaam is in rebellion, and God confronts Balaam by miraculously speaking to him through his donkey. However highly you might think of yourself, and however lowly you may think of someone else, if God can speak correcting words to Balaam through a donkey, he can also speak correcting words to you through any human being he may choose.

Which leaves us with motive. And here we need to make a distinction between motive and accuracy. And a good case-study of this is Jonah.

If you know the story of Jonah then you know that after the whole incident with the fish, Jonah goes to Nineveh and he delivers the prophetic warning that unless Nineveh repents, God will destroy them.

And the author of the Book of Jonah highlights two important things. One is that Jonah hated the people of Nineveh and he very much wanted them to be destroyed. The other was that the people of Nineveh were to listen to him anyway, because Jonah's prophetic confrontation was from the Lord, even if Jonah himself, in his heart, was in opposition to the Lord. And the people did listen. They didn't discard Jonah's words because he hated them. They realized that Jonah could have bad motives but still be correct about them.

Sometimes people confront us with bad motives. They may be enemies who hate us. Or they may be allies who are marked by discontentedness and a grumbling spirit. They don't hate us, but they are never satisfied, even when we try to hear them out. They tend to be naysayers. They tend to have a critical spirit.

In each case, we still need to hear their prophetic confrontation. We still need to consider it. And if it is accurate, we need to respond to it.

But in each case we also need to keep in mind that our goal – our calling – is not to please them, but to please the Lord. God may use them in our lives, but they may still end up angry and complaining like Jonah. Their response isn't the point. God's response is the point. The prophetic confrontation may come through our adversaries, through nay-sayers, or through those who love us. Our calling in each case is to hear it. And yet, we often make ourselves resistant instead.

WAYS THAT WE MAKE OURSELVES PROPHET-RESISTANT

So let's consider the ways we make ourselves prophet-resistant.

And I want to consider four different ways we might do this, and apply each one to several different areas of life.

Ignoring Prophetic Voices Outside Our Tribe

The first way that we tend to make ourselves prophet-resistant is by ignoring prophetic voices that come from outside of our tribe.

By ignoring prophetic voices that come from outside of our tribe. By which I mean: by ignoring prophetic voices that come from people who are different from us.

Saul often did this by cultivating suspicion of many who were outside of his literal tribe. David, we should note, was willing to allow for the possibility that he needed to be corrected even by family members of an adversary's household [1 Sam 25; 2 Sam 20:5-10].

But we tend to ignore, discredit, and discard the voices of outsiders.

We see this, for example, in our politics.

One would think that those who are most engaged in politics would be the ones who best understand their ideological opponents. Instead, a recent study found that those Americans who consume the most news were actually three times more likely to have inaccurate perceptions of their political opponents than those who said they read the news "only now and then." ["The Perception Gap"; French, *Divided We Fall*, 2] This is because the kind of news coverage most people prefer to consume is the kind that reaffirms the views they already hold, and presents mere caricatures of the opposition. In other words, we'd rather hear from political pundits who will caricature our opponents, and thus make us more resistant to hearing any prophetic correction those outside our tribe may have for us. We prefer pundits who will make us prophet-resistant and shelter us from hard truths we don't want to hear.

In a similar way, we also tend to ignore outside prophetic voices within the church. Here's just one example: If you are a white Christian who has cast doubt about the prevalence of racism in America today, have you ever sought out the voices of Black Christians in America who disagree with you? And if not, then why not?

Now, to be clear – I’m not asking if you’ve searched and found a Black Christian who agrees with you and then used them to win an argument with someone else. I’m asking if you, in order to hear a possibly prophetic voice from someone outside your white evangelical tribe, have sought out thoughtful minority voices who disagree with you about the plight of racial minorities in America, so that you might hear them, and consider what they have to say? Or have you ignored those voices within the Church that are outside of your cultural or ethnic tribe?

We might ask similar questions about our congregation. How likely are we to hear challenges or correction from a Christian of a different liturgical tradition? Or a different theological tradition? Or are we more likely to write them off for being outside of our theological and liturgical tribe?

Or what about in our personal lives? How willing are we to hear a prophetic confronting voice from someone who is different from us? Or, if they are different from us will we just dismiss their words, and tell ourselves that they just don’t “get it”?

In a range of ways we can be tempted to make ourselves prophet-resistant by ignoring critical voices that come from outside of our tribe – outside of our circle of cultural comfort.

That’s one way we can become prophet-resistant.

Label Prophetic Voices in Our Tribe as Outsiders

A second way we can make ourselves prophet-resistant is that when someone from within our tribe does confront us, we label them as an outsider too.

We see this tendency emerge in the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. When Jeremiah delivered God’s word to Judah in Jeremiah 37 and 38, the people did not receive it, but instead Jeremiah was accused of being loyal to Judah’s enemies, and of working for Judah’s harm rather than their good.

And we do the same thing today. On the national and political stage it is all too common for leaders and pundits to treat prophetic voices from within their tribe as agents of their enemies.

And the same thing is not uncommon within the evangelical church.

After John Piper wrote an article that challenged Christians to take both policy *and* character into account when they voted in the 2020 presidential election, one of the largest Christian universities in the country pulled Piper’s recent videos on discipleship from their website. Apparently, by challenging evangelicals in this way, Piper’s credibility on evangelical discipleship was now in question. [Shellnutt]

And these kinds of responses are not unique. Tim Keller has repeatedly challenged evangelicals to think about the current effects of systemic and historic racism. This has led to recent claims online that he is secretly funded by liberal billionaire George Soros. Keller recently had to publicly deny those claims. [Keller]

The implication is that if someone like John Piper or someone like Tim Keller challenges us on something that makes us uncomfortable, then maybe they're not really Reformed evangelicals after all. Maybe they're not one of us. And so maybe we don't have to really listen to them.

And we can do this at the congregational level too.

Especially in a church like ours, that has been blessed by so many who have such a long history within our church ... it can be really easy to label other congregants as outsiders.

It can be really easy when someone challenges us as a congregation to say: "Well ... they're not really that 'Faith Pres' ... they haven't been here as long as we have. They don't really get it." And just like that, we can label prophetic voices that are challenging us as outsiders.

And I should note that there is a reformer's version of this too. If you are someone who both loves this church and wants to see it change in certain ways, you too can be tempted to treat those who challenge you or your views as if they are the real outsiders: *they* are the ones who don't understand the real Faith Pres – *they* are the ones out of touch with the true congregation.

In both cases, we label those who challenge us as outsiders, so that we can ignore their challenge to us.

It can be a trend in our personal lives as well. When someone challenges us on a personal level, one of our deep instincts is to push them away. To shift our thinking about them. To start thinking of them less as a close friend or a confidant. We make them outsiders. Then we can more easily disregard their challenge in our lives.

In a range of ways we can make ourselves prophet-resistant by labeling those close to us as outsiders if they challenge us.

We Resist the Idea That Someone Else Might Have Insight that We Lack

Third, we can often resist the very idea that someone else might have insight into our situation that we ourselves lack.

David doesn't respond to Nathan by saying that he knows what's going on in his life better than Nathan does. But that's basically what Saul did. Back in First Samuel 13, when Samuel confronted Saul, Saul essentially argued that *he* knew better than the Prophet Samuel what need to be done with the sacrifice to God.

And Saul would have made a great 21st century American. Because we love denying the value of expertise. We love to deny that anyone else's education or experience gives them any more insight into anything than we might have: whether it's politics, economics, medicine, epidemiology, sociology, or something else, we are confident that after a few hours with Google, we can have as much insight as those who have dedicated decades to any given field.

Now, of course any field – any guild – can be prone to groupthink and error. History is filled with examples. But our over-confidence in ourselves goes far beyond a healthy caution about misguided institutional orthodoxies.

I spoke about this a few months ago in a sermon, but this tendency is called the “Dunning-Kruger” effect. The effect, which has now been observed in over a hundred studies, shows that time and time again people with the “least ability [in a given field] are often most likely to over-rate their skills to the greatest extent.” [Dunning]

In other words, the more ignorant we are, the more likely we are to overestimate our knowledge. And, I would add, the more likely we also tend to be to ignore prophetic confrontations that we might be wrong.

It shows up in all sorts of fields in our national life, but it is quite prevalent in the church as well. American evangelicalism has a long anti-intellectual streak. Generally speaking, American Christians are quick to deny that anyone’s additional study of the Scriptures means that that person might have more insight into God’s word than they do. I remember being told in seminary: “Don’t assume for a minute that your seminary degree will mean that your congregation thinks you have anything to teach them that they don’t already know.”

But then, of course, insight is not limited to education or expertise. Experience, personality, and perspective also play in. Yet we are often quick to dismiss that such things can give someone insight we lack.

I’ve quoted it before, but David Foster Wallace put it like this. He writes: “Other people can often see things about you that you yourself cannot see, even if those people are stupid.” [*Infinite Jest*, 204]

I have generally found this to be true. Yet we often want to deny it, even when we know that the other person is not stupid.

And so, a third way we can make ourselves prophet-resistant is that we resist the very idea that someone else might have insight that we lack.

Assuming Bad Motives of Our Critics & Good Motives of Our Defenders

Fourth and finally, one more common way that we make ourselves prophet-resistant is that we assume bad motives of anyone who confronts us, and we assume good motives of anyone who defends us.

We are often quick to assume that anyone who defends us or our tribe, anyone who denies a critique of us, anyone who minimizes or rationalizes our shortcomings, anyone who points out instead the flaws of those who are confronting us: those people are looking out for our good.

And we assume as well that anyone who is confronting us must be out to harm us. They must have something to gain by it. They must want to see us, or our cause, fail.

The way David French has put it is “The Church Needs Prophets, But It Wants Lawyers.”

And so we assume malicious intent of prophets while assuming good will from flatterers.

But malicious intent is an accusation God's prophets have heard time and time again over the centuries. In truth, it is just another way that we try to make ourselves prophet-resistant. And it leads to spiritual death.

ACTUAL APPLICATION

The problem we see, in a variety of areas of life, and in a variety of ways, is that people make themselves prophet-resistant.

And now ... I want you to stop for a minute.

If you have been paying attention – if you have been tracking with me, then I want to ask you something: Who have you been thinking about this whole time?

As we've gone through all these ways people might resist the prophetic voices in their lives, who has primarily come to mind for you? Who have you been thinking about?

Because I'm willing to bet that for most of the time you have been thinking about how this applies to other people. You have been thinking about how other people do this, and how other people need to stop resisting voices of correction in their lives.

It's an easy thing to do. We see it right in our text. Nathan begins not with a direct confrontation, but with a story that seems to be about someone else. And when thinking of someone else, David can see the sin clearly – probably more clearly than if Nathan had come out first about him.

But now you need to hear the words of Nathan the prophet. Because if you have spent much of the last half-hour thinking about other people, then I need to say to you the very same thing that Nathan said to David: That person that you have been getting frustrated at for doing this – that woman you have been thinking of – that man, real or hypothetical, that you have been judging for the past half hour: "*You* are the man!" *You* are the woman. *You* are the guilty party. *You* have done this. And *you* need to repent.

And this might be especially true for those of you who think of yourself as the prophetic voice. If you have spent any portion of this sermon thinking to yourself "Yes. I agree. People should listen to *me* more often!" then you might especially need to hear these words. Your confidence that you are the solution is a red flag that you might have become quite prophet-resistant yourself. And that could be true even if your prophetic words to others are accurate. Remember Jonah. And don't flatter yourself.

So stop now, and consider where *you* need to repent.

In our culture or in the political sphere, in the life of the broader church, in our congregation, in your personal life: how have you made yourself prophet-resistant?

How have you ignored, slandered, and discarded voices from those who are different from you? How have you falsely labeled those close to you as being outsiders when they said something that you found challenging? How have you denied even the possibility that other people might know more about something they are confronting you about than you know? How have you assumed that anyone who agrees with you, or defends your actions, or attacks your enemies is your friend? How have you assumed that anyone who confronts you in difficult ways is your enemy?

How have *you* made yourself prophet-resistant?

Hearing prophetic voices in our lives is the path of life, and indeed, it is the way of wisdom. For we read in the book of Proverbs:

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.” [Proverbs 12:15]

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” [Proverbs 14:12]

“A scoffer does not like to be reproved; he will not go to the wise.” [Proverbs 15:12]

“The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence. The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.” [Proverbs 15:31-33]

“A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.” [Proverbs 17:10]

“Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.” [Proverbs 12:1]

“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.” [Proverbs 18:2]

“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” [Proverbs 18:13]

“Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray.” [Proverbs 10:17]

We live in a foolish world.

We live in a prophet-resistant age.

We are called to be different.

Too often we are not.

And so, let us heed God’s prophetic word to us this evening. Let us take stock of our hearts, and our minds, and our lives, and let us seriously consider where we have made ourselves prophet-resistant.

Let us remember that God sends us prophetic confrontation *out of love* – in order to forgive us, and restore us, and make us more like him – not to destroy us.

And so, confident of his love, confident of his grace no matter our sin, let us, like David, be a congregation of men and women who will humbly hear the prophetic voices that the Lord provides us.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

- Dunning, David. For a good summary of the Dunning-Kruger effect, see this TED talk:
https://youtu.be/pOLmD_WVY-E
- French, David. *Divided We Fall: America's Secession Threat and How to Restore Our Nation*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press: 2020.
- French, David. "The Crisis of Christian Celebrity." *The Dispatch: The French Press*. December 6, 2020.
<https://frenchpress.thedispatch.com/p/the-crisis-of-christian-celebrity>
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