

A Response from Warren Gouman, Senior Pastor, South City Centre:

Response to Kathy's Prophetic word

(Re: September 28)

Introduction

Circulated around Christian circles recently is a paper suggesting that a big earthquake will happen near Christchurch on September 28, 2011. It is written in the form of a prophetic word given to Kathy Robinson, dated March 16, 2011. Added to this, is a prediction from Ken Ring that if another earthquake was going to happen, it could happen around this date. This obviously raises caution and questions for most of us. I am not a scientist so I cannot comment on Ken Ring's predictions. Personally I think it wise to be cautious for the next few months given the seismic activity that we have had. (Have a survival kit, torch with batteries, good supply of water, agreed on meeting place for family, etc) The focus for many though is not the predictions, but the prophecy. Has Kathy heard from God of an impending disaster?

I believe it is UNLIKELY that Kathy's prophecy will come to pass, for the following reasons:

1) It is Old Testament not New Testament in style

A clear theme of the New Testament is grace that has come through Christ. This is possible because Christ has carried God's judgement, meant for us upon Himself, at the cross. Because of this, widespread judgement on cities and nations in the New Testament is deferred to the end of this age, when Christ returns. Jesus as well as the Apostles at times, prophesied widespread disastrous judgement upon cities and nations in the New Testament, but almost always in the context of the tribulation just before Christ returns.

Prophecy in the New Testament is given as a gift to the church to encourage and guide, rather than warn of impending disaster. (I accept there is one example of a prophetic word in Acts of a famine coming and how the church ought to respond to this, but this is not given in a "turn or burn," Old Testament style)

Because prophecy changed from the office of a prophet for the nation, to a gift of encouragement and direction for individuals and churches, prophecies were "weighed" by church leaders and other prophets and "tested" to see if there was a community witness with the word given. Paul encourages the church not to despise the gift of prophecy (1 Thess 5:20), however, he also acknowledged that we don't always recognise which is a true or false prophecy or interpret them correctly. (1 Cor 13:9) That is why Paul instructs the church to "*weigh carefully what is said.*" (1 Cor 14:29) I am concerned that Kathy's prophecy has an overemphasis on present judgement and lacks an emphasis on the current work of Christ's church in bringing His Kingdom to the city. It is fearful, not missional.

2) It lacks credible support from Church leaders and other prophetic ministries

The New Testament church had many prophets speaking on a number of subjects in the early days of the church. All of these prophecies were weighed by church leaders and many were deemed as being false. Of course, we will not know if Kathy's prophecy is true or false until September 29; however, we can look to other leaders to see whether they have a witness to its credibility. Kathy belongs to a house church in Amberley. Her pastor does not accept any responsibility for what Kathy has said. Kathy actually gave the prophecy before she joined the group. Warren Lyons, (referred to in her paper), has refuted giving her permission to quote him or use his name when sending it out. I know of no other church leader or well known prophetic ministry that has endorsed Kathy's prophecy. I think it is unfortunate the way the prophecy has been distributed. It would have been a lot more beneficial for Kathy to bring it to some of the church leaders around Canterbury and for them to hear her heart and pray together as to an appropriate response and it's distribution.

3) It is very unusual for God to give a specific date or time in a prophecy.

It is a lot more common for God to reveal that a particular event will follow from a previous season and then describe what that season will look like. Or prophecy certain features of that time or season. Both in my reading of scripture and pastoral experience, genuine prophecies don't give specific times or dates. This isn't to say, that God won't reveal a specific date, if He needed to; just that it is not normally the case.

4) The assumptions it makes of the way God is thinking and the consequences of His actions seem unlikely and exaggerated.

In the paper Kathy says: “The Lord has also spoken to me and said ‘*I have been patient for a very long time, but now my wrath is kindled... When the spirit of Christchurch is broken, the city will become Christ’s church.*’” How come, God has not given her and many other faithful followers of Christ these strong warnings of judgement over many years if this is the case? – Also, unfortunately we have not seen much evidence of broken people in Christchurch turning to Christ. Personally without a powerful move of the Holy Spirit, (which we are praying for) I think, even a big earthquake is unlikely to bring this about. I wholeheartedly agree that we ought to be praying for our city. I believe God’s heart breaks for our city. I believe that we need to partner with Christ and extend His Kingdom, because we never know when Christ may return, but I have no conviction that God is specifically judging Christchurch for our sins, which Kathy’s paper implies.

Conclusion

It is important that each of us prayerfully considers prophetic words. All Christians are guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth. (John 16:13) If God leads you different to me, then follow your convictions, not mine. Kathy is not infallible and neither am I. I am simply sharing the journey that I have been on in weighing this word for myself and my family. I have done my best to weigh Kathy’s word with the Bible, with other Christian leaders and with what the Holy Spirit has shown me. I could be wrong, and if I am, I will be doing a lot of soul searching and will accept the need to listen more carefully and be more open next time. However, for now, I will be in Christchurch on September 28.

Response from Steve Graham, Principal of Laidlaw College, Christchurch Branch.

My Developing Thoughts about the Prediction of Another Earthquake:

Man it was good to get out of Christchurch today and get a bit of a perspective on the wave of concern about a prediction of a major earthquake in Christchurch on September 28. Sitting with a group of Christian leaders involved in national church leadership, including some recognised by their churches as prophets, when I mentioned this, the response was interesting - there was a singular lack of interest – like “well we all know that those predictions never come true” - and relative unbelief that there could be widespread concern in the Christian community. However what did provoke a response was when I told them about the response of some to think about packing up their stuff and leaving the city for the day – the response was “well that’s a Christian response! NOT!” Perhaps as my friend Blair the social worker says it’s all a sign of the level of anxiety we are all under here.

It is interesting that it has been such a struggle for some to get a clear conviction about this. “Like I am 99% sure this is not rightbut...I have a little niggler”. Maybe people need to talk together and we get a developing conviction.

So again I do not purport to have the final word on this but this is my developing perspective – as I reflect and as I listen to what others are thinking:

I totally disagree with the spirituality and theology behind the prediction.

I am convinced this reflects what happens when the intercessory and prophetic movement is not (in Pentecostal language) in submission to the apostolic – in less strange language – that this subjective spirituality is not linked to our basic mandate which is to be agents of God’s redemptive kingdom, winning the lost, making disciples, building churches and being salt and light in our communities. The Bible does indeed talk about God’s wrath and judgement. However it shows God took his wrath upon himself at the cross. It then talks about a future final judgement when God will step in to stop the brokenness of the world and renew his creation. In between God commissions his people to GO – it is the age of grace, of the church, of mission, in the power of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus spoke about judgement he spoke about judgement at the end of the age, final judgement, even of cities. Jesus mission was good news to the poor, opening the eyes of the blind, setting free the captives and declaring the day of God’s favour (and he stopped the quotation there saying that was now fulfilled – he specifically left out a mission of declaring the vengeance of God). Paul followed this same strategy. The prophetic needs to be seen as one input into THIS agenda.

For its own health it needs to be in relation to apostolic, pastoral, evangelistic and teaching gifts.

Part of this way of understanding the world is that we currently live in a good but broken world where tragedy happens. Romans 8 says we live in a world awaiting liberation from groaning, suffering and frustration. We are called to groan with this world in its brokenness. And to be God's agents of his kingdom in this world.

The prediction also portrays a false sense of prophecy. Those who function in this area say 'don't do dates'. Why? The fulfilment of God purposes are always complex and mysterious and almost never as obvious as we think. Even Jesus didn't do dates. Why?

One good reason is the clear teaching that prophecy is partial, limited and in unclear riddles. This side of eternity we don't get crystal clear insight. We walk by faith not by sight. We get glimpses.

But the other main reason is that fundamentally prophecy is not about prediction. It is about a call to action now, based on if you keep doing this bad thing then this bad future will happen but if you change and do this good thing then this other good future will happen.

So in that God is not releasing his wrath on Christchurch, that the earthquakes should not be seen as God's judgement on Christchurch and that prophets should not stray into date-setting, the usual response would be to ignore this kind of thing.

But even if I disagree with the basic theological perspective and the understanding of prophecy.... well all of us have limited perspectives... what if this person was a 'seer' and had perceived something even if integrated into what I consider a faulty theological framework.

What if this is God? What if this is the one case where date-setting is right? Then the big question is what should a Christian response be? Ask that question and I think that's where some clarity finally comes.

First of all I should pray. This is really another point under the nature of prophecy. God invites his people into prayer and specifically when he warns of judgement it is actually so that his people can pray that it DOESN'T happen! Look at Abram and Sodom, look at Moses and Israel, look at God's call to Ezekiel to find someone who would stand in the gap. If we think there is a possibility this could be true, surely our first response is "please God no." Pray for peace for the land, pray for the settling of the quakes, pray for safety, pray that another disaster might be averted.

What else should I do?

See I used to be a missionary – we felt called to an Asian slum and so we lived among the people; later we felt called to a people in the middle of an armed conflict and so we lived among them. Now we feel called to Christchurch. So what if there is going to be a big earthquake, what if it triggers a tsunami? I live on the banks of the Heathcote. Where should I be? Might sound a bit melodramatic but shouldn't I be there with my neighbours if a tsunami comes rumbling up the river? But what if I died? Well doesn't that mean I am instantly ushered into glory, into the paradise of God, into the presence of God? And if it does come and I don't die... well then I stand with my neighbours in the massive task of then rebuilding and I have to dig even deeper into Christian hope to inspire our city to hope and the challenge of God's heart to bring recovery and rebuilding and redemption just asks even more of me!

Paul has an interesting angle on spirituality.

Philippians 1:21-26 ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean

fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

If I die I get to be with the Lord; if I stay I get to serve God's mission in the world.

Kind of weird that people who would think of themselves as really spiritual would be scared of dying and reluctant to be involved in mission? Just saying!

So what should we do? There's the weird thing. But my friends might be killed? Shouldn't I warn them? Yes but they might die tomorrow. That's why Jesus calls us to witness to our faith through word and deed! So what's different if I knew there was going to be an earthquake on September 28?

Well we could prepare. Yes but even the science says there are likely to be more significant aftershocks, and at some point the alpine fault will go ... not might go... it will go ... and there will be a disaster. Might be in 1000 years, might be tomorrow. So I should be prepared. I heard one expert say be ready to survive at your home for 72 hours.

See here's the rub: whatever might happen on September 28 might happen any and every single day of my life. And while I live, I engage in loving mission in the world and in particular in the city that God has called me to and that he has called me to love. And when I die my labour in Christ is complete.

Could all end tomorrow! Could end Sept 28! Could end, for me, in 20 years, 30 years!

One last thought, bottom line, I want to listen to the wisdom of godly leaders with a track record of missional initiatives in our city, people who live out this mission and in living connection with the spirit. People like David MacGregor, Sam Harvey, Chris Chamberlain, Warren Gouman, Chris Ponniah, Alan Jamieson, Murray Talbot, Murray Robertson, Max Palmer, Paul Bennetts, Bishop Victoria, etc etc (no offence intended to those not listed).