

God Speaks To Us and Through Us (Acts 2:17-18)

Teaching on "The Gift of Prophecy" available online today (practical how to)

- What should we do when we believe we have received revelation from God?
- How do we approach the delivery or reporting of a prophecy?
- What do we do when we are given a prophecy from another person?
- How do we judge or evaluate prophecies given to us?

We are still exploring the event and effects of Pentecost (**Spirit upon**)

The grand effects of Pentecost

- The whole church was made vividly aware of God's presence
- There was a boldness to speak the truth about Jesus
- There was a deep conviction of sin
- There was a great harvest

The granular effects of Pentecost

- Christ-like mellow boldness in the believer
- Joy that is manifest in the fact we don't take ourselves too seriously
- We start seeing the Bible come true around us

Specific effects of Pentecost

- **Visions, dreams** and **prophesying** (Acts 2:17-18) (i.e. God speaking to us and through us)

"In the last days"

- From Pentecost until the Lord's return
 - (cf. **verses 19-21** - apocalyptic events just before His return)
 - **Verse 21** - is indicative of the season of **harvest** in which we live (bet. Pentecost and *Parousia*)
 - **Remember:** Pentecost marked the beginning of the Summer Harvest Season
 - This is the time in which we live (between Pentecost and the *Parousia*)

In this time, God is working in and through His people

- One of the ways He does so is prophetically (Acts 2:18, NASB)
 - Side note: **Verse 17** says "**on all mankind**" (figurative) but the context is those who are His
 - **Throughout history** God has worked through His people and has done so by His Spirit...
 - **The significance of the passage** and of Pentecost is the **NEW scope** of that work
 - **Upon my bondslaves: Men & women, young & old, sons & daughters** (all God's peeps)
 - In the OT God's Spirit came upon some people, but not widely or all inclusively
 - For a time, for a purpose, and then could be removed
 - Prime example was an OT prophet-to speak God's word and do God's work
 - Now, we all called and may all be **enabled** to speak God's words and do God's work

This work is accomplished many ways, but as we have been learning, it must be done in the power of the Spirit

- Part of what it means to have the upon power of the Spirit is that **we shall prophesy**
 - Which includes **visions** and **dreams** as well as **words** (specific revelation from God)

What is happening when we have **dreams** and **visions** and **prophetic words**?

- **God is speaking by mysterious means to us, that He may accomplish His glorious purposes through us**

Now, let's do some background work

- Biblical assumption: God speaks to His people
- What separates the one true God from false gods is that God speaks! (Idols do not; Cf. **Isaiah 46:5-7**)
 - In the garden-God spoke
 - In the burning bush-God spoke
 - On the mountain-God spoke

- In the pillar of fire and cloud-God was speaking
- Through His prophets-God speaks
- In the still small voice-God was speaking
- Through His Son-God speaks to us
- Through His word-God has spoken and continues to speak to us
- And through **dreams, visions** and **prophetic words**-God still speaks to us

Aside: His Son and His Word are **final** and **authoritative**, without error and binding for all time for all people

- But God still speaks to His people today-prophetically-concerning our lives and world
 - **John 16:13-15**, NLT
- Some argue that He does not, but there is no biblical basis for that at all (speculative fabricated)
 - That would be a strange picture of the God of the Bible indeed
 - He has always spoken!
 - Because He loves us, He has spoken to us **in His Son** and **through His Word** and by **prophetic means (this text is telling us that)**
 - I think the true reason some people reject prophetic means is because they have been affected by how people mess it up (weird or false examples)(that is not how we form doctrine)
 - Are we to throw the baby out with the bathwater? **(A good love gift from God; salvific)**
 - **1 Thessalonians 5:19-21**, NASB and **1 Corinthians 14:1 & 39**, NLT
 - We humbly recognize because we are involved, it is going to get messy as we err and falter
 - But the Church belongs to Jesus and He is faithful and will prevail despite us (this has always been the way that God has worked)
 - He never once, no not ever one single time, worked through a person that was not sinful or messy!
- Noah did really bad things when he drank too much
- Abraham made some horrible decisions
- Jacob was a liar
- Joseph was abused
- Moses couldn't speak well
- Gideon was too afraid
- Sampson was a womanizer
- Rahab was a prostitute
- King David had an affair and was a murderer
- Jeremiah was depressed
- Elijah was suicidal
- Jonah ran from God's call
- Mary Magdalene was demon possessed
- The Samaritan Woman had a series of broken marriages
- The Disciples fell asleep when asked to stay awake and pray
- Peter outright denied Christ
- Paul was a persecutor of the Church
- You get the picture...

And yet, God's purposes prevail!

New Testament prophecy (**dreams, visions, words, leading**) work the same way

- God speaking to and through messy, imperfect, saved, loved sons and daughters
- A faithful biblical community pursues these things and practices grace to grow in them

The NT function of prophecy is different from the OT office of prophet

OT prophets spoke the very words of God and as such had absolute authority in what they said

- To disobey an OT prophet was to disobey God. The authority rested with them.
- Their words became Scripture.
- Therefore, they had tremendous responsibility. When they were wrong, they were held accountable with their lives.

The NT *function of prophecy* is not the same

- We now have the completed Bible and it holds absolute authority for what God speaks. To disobey Scripture is to disobey God. The authority rests with Scripture.
- Since we have completed Scripture, the NT function of prophecy **is not** the reporting of the very words of God, rather, it is reporting in merely human words something that God has brought to mind

A purported "word from God" should be esteemed differently from The Very Word of God (not eternally binding)

What may happen is that we make mistakes in trying to discern and report what God seems to be saying to us or through us (sounds sketchy... but here is an example from Acts)

Acts 21:4, 10-14, NLT

- What is happening here?
 - Paul received a prophecy that if he went to Jerusalem he would suffer persecution
 - He decided to go anyway-why?
 - 1 Corinthians 14:29, NLT (judge or evaluate)
 - Paul judged the **content** of the prophecy to be right (**what would happen**), but the **interpretation** to be wrong (**what he should do**)
 - Those urging Paul not to go to Jerusalem had received revelation of the persecution awaiting him and were correct in reporting that (Agabus), **but wrong in** their interpretation, application, implications (that he should not go) **they should not have even interpreted it-only reported**
 - Perhaps the reporting should have been: **God is revealing that hard times are coming in Jerusalem**
 - **NT prophecy is not the very word of God but rather reporting in merely human words something God brings to mind**

Because of the nature of it, it **requires some kind of translation** by the one receiving the revelation

- And so in the reporting **there can be error**-either in **what we think it means** or the **words we use** to report it
- It can be very hard to separate or not add our own thoughts to what is being revealed

For this reason when prophesying we should never say, "**Thus saith the Lord...**"

- Or anything else that connotes that sort of **absolute, infallible authority** (unless it is Scripture)
- Rather we should say things like: "**I think the Lord is showing me that...**" or "**I think the Lord is indicating that...**" or "**It seems that the Lord is putting on my heart a concern that...**"
 - And be very careful to not add according to our own understanding

Be that as it may, what we see in Acts is that Jesus' followers are regularly led by prophetic words and visions

Some examples of prophetic leading in Acts

- Acts 5:3 - Peter and Ananias - prophetic word (maintained purity in the church)
- Acts 7:55-56 - Stephen being martyred - prophetic vision (provided hope in a desperate time)
- Acts 8:29 - Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch - prophetic leading (the Gospel going where it had not)
- Acts 9:10-17 - Ananias and Saul the persecutor - prophetic instruction (the Apostle Paul commissioned)
- Acts 10:9-19 - Peter and Cornelius - prophetic vision and leading (the Gospel going to the Gentiles)
- Acts 13:1-3 - the church at Antioch - prophetic word (Paul and Barnabas sent out to do missionary work)
- Acts 15:28 - the council in Jerusalem - prophetic leading (first huge problem)
- Acts 16:6-10 - Paul and friends - prophetic word and vision (which see)

We see the Holy Spirit directing God's people by the means of God speaking

- **(Individuals, Groups, Whole churches)**
- With profound implications for the mission (that is the why!)

So, that is the Christian experience after Pentecost (meant to be normative)

- To deny that as the Christian experience now is to totally deny Scripture
- It is both prescriptive (Joel's prophecy... "**This is that...**") and descriptive (the examples)
 - Romans 8:14, NLT
 - Example: Lomas': I had a **vision**; there was a **prophetic word**; the woman's **dream**
 - Been seeing the same sort of thing in *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*
 - Sermon online = a lot of personal examples from me

The **good news** is that we see in Scripture that the Holy Spirit clearly speaks and leads-and very specifically
The **tough news** is that we are not really told exactly how this happens

Audible? Thoughts? Impressions? Feelings?

- Acts 8:29 – ‘the Spirit **said** to Philip’
- Acts 10:19 – ‘the Spirit **said to him**’
- Acts 11:12 – ‘the Spirit **told me**’
- Acts 13:2 – ‘the Holy Spirit **said**’
- Acts 16:6 – ‘**forbidden by** the Holy Spirit’
- Acts 16:7 – ‘the Spirit of Jesus **did not permit them**’
- Acts 16:9 – ‘**a vision**’
- Acts 16:10 – ‘God **had called us**’
- Acts 20:22 – ‘**bound in the Spirit**’
- Acts 20:23 – ‘the Spirit **solemnly testifies to me**’

We do not always understand how it happens and cannot necessarily control when it happens

- But we must believe that it does happen-God speaks to and through His people (Scripture says so)
- God is more willing to speak to us and to lead us than we are willing to listen and be led
- So, we must obey the Bible and ask God to speak to and through us

Then, go on the journey of discovering how God speaks to you prophetically (it is more art than science)

Here is where you start:

1. Create spaces and practices that open you up to God (Scripture and prayer)
2. Eliminate distractions that close you off from God (entertainment and technology)
3. Give heed to what you know God is already saying to you

“Let each one **who would be led by the Spirit begin by giving his or her self to be led of the Word of God as far as they know it. Begin at the beginning: obey the commandments.**” –Andrew Murray¹

4. Determine to engage in God’s purposes around you

Then: Learning to discern His voice and leading (stepping out and making mistakes) (God is bigger than...)

- Be saturated in God’s very Word!
- Find a mentor (some people move in this area more than others)
- Be primarily concerned for the glory of Jesus (**your life, yes**—but His glory in and through your life)

The Father cares for you more than you can imagine

- He wants **to lead you in paths of righteousness** for His glory and your good

God has this for us—and we can trust Him

- The Promise of the Father (The Spirit upon us) is good

A couple of ways to respond

- Just ask (you have not because you ask not)
- Identify what He is already telling you and determine to do it
- Bring your great needs and fears and unknowns before Him
- Determine to step out into God’s purposes (He will lead you)

Prayer: Holy Spirit come... speak to the beloved sons and daughters of God... lead us in Christ’s glory

¹ Murray, 130.