

I've given today's message the title "The gift of prophecy – Eagerly desiring and carefully discerning." And that pretty much sums up today's message.

The gift of Prophecy – next to the gift of Languages, is probably the second most contentious of all of the Spiritual Gifts. And yet it shouldn't be. Paul spends a fair bit of time, teaching us about the Gift of Prophecy, right here in 1 Corinthians 14. ... But **unlike** the gift of Languages (which should usually be used in private), the gift of Prophecy is something to be shared.

And what makes this gift 'contentious', is once again, the Cessationists believe "the gift of prophecy has passed away". They believe it's one of the 'sign gifts', and it's not needed any more, because once the New Testament was written, the revelation of God was complete, and there was no need for any further revelation, and so the gift of prophecy just stopped.

But, a few weeks ago, we discussed that belief, and how it's largely based, on a profound misrepresentation of the Scriptures. We **are** told that these gifts will pass away (sure enough), but that's not going to happen until the perfect has come. When is that? Well, clearly it's when Jesus returns. When we are in the presence of God (face-to-face), we're not going to need the gift of Prophecy any more. But Jesus hasn't come back yet, has He????

And if God wants to share:

- a word of encouragement; or
- a word of direction; or

- an assurance of His purpose; or
- an assurance of His presence,

don't you think it's important that we hear that word? ... I do... And that's why the gift of prophecy is still very important today...

Now, before we actually dig in to what the gift of prophecy is (and how it should be used), I want to give you 4, simple, **Biblical** reasons, why I believe the Gift of Prophecy continues today:

1. Firstly, we are living in “the last days”. “Prophecy” is listed among the Spiritual Gifts, and the Gifts are given for the building up of the church. And while ever the church continues to exist, God continues to do **His mighty work**, through the church, through the power of His Holy Spirit, through Spiritual gifts. And there is no biblical evidence that we should expect these gifts to disappear **before** Jesus returns. They continue, right to the end. We are living in the last days.

In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church at Pentecost, Peter gave an explanation of what was happening, and he quotes the Prophet Joel, **Acts 2:**¹⁷ “**In the last days, God says, (In the last days – not for a few short years, after Jesus ascended into heaven, but in the last days) I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.**

There once was a time (and we can read about it in the **Old Testament**), when God’s Holy Spirit was given to only a very few special people, to carry out God’s purposes. But on that day of Pentecost, everything changed. From then on, God would pour out His Spirit on **all** people – On **everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord.

We are living in the last days. The ‘last days’ haven’t finished – that’s what makes them ‘the last days’. The last days continue until Jesus returns. **Our sons and daughters will prophecy** . **Our young men will see visions. Our old men will dream dreams.**

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord.

2. Secondly, in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, (the last book of the Bible, and the last series that we studied[BTW]) ... And in this book, we are told about 2 witnesses, who will appear at the end of time, and these witnesses are very clearly described as “prophets”, and what they do, includes prophecy. Now, we know that the Book of Revelation is very symbolic, but whether these be 2 literal witnesses, or whether they represent the witness of the whole Christian church (which I believe they do), we are specifically told, that they will prophecy...

Here we are, in the final chapter of the world’s history, and God’s faithful witnesses, are prophesying...

3. The third reason I believe the Spiritual gift of prophecy continues, is because we're warned to watch out for **false** prophets. They're described as "wolves in sheep's clothing"... That means, they **look** like 'the real deal' – Sometimes it's not so easy to distinguish a false prophet from a true prophet... And often, people are led astray by false prophets...

Now, if the gift of prophecy has finished, why would there be any danger of being led astray by a false prophet???... It would be very **easy** to pick a false prophet – because **any** prophet would be a false prophet...

But, because the gift of prophecy continues, it is behooving for us, to watch out for false prophets.

4. And fourthly, I believe the gift of prophecy continues, because we are commanded, to eagerly desire the Spiritual gifts – **especially** the gift of Prophecy. We **are** commanded to **test** it... But we are also commanded to not despise it, and to eagerly desire it...

Righto, so what is it? Is the Gift of Prophecy like the prophets of the Old Testament? Or is it something different today?

As I was preparing for today, I read a number of different definitions of the gift of prophecy, and some theologians have a tendency to present the gift of prophecy, as something more like a gift of preaching... Some use the distinction between

fore-telling (telling what will happen in the future), and they say “that was the Old Testament version of a prophet”, as opposed to forth-telling (simply preaching, what we’ve already been told in the Scriptures [both about today, and about the future]), And they say, “That’s what New Testament prophecy is about.”... I don’t think that really stacks up.

I am determined today, that we’re not going to try and explain it away – we’re going to search the scriptures, about what the Scriptures say, for the church today...

So, let’s begin with today’s reading, but we’ll also draw from other passages in the Bible, to fill out our understanding.

1. Firstly, Prophecy is a gift that we should desire. V1: **Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.**

Now, to “earnestly desire”, is to ‘crave’ it – to almost be ‘jealous’, but not in a negative way – “I really, really want this gift – God, please give me the gift of prophecy”...

2. But why should we desire it? Is it for our own benefit? Not at all. It’s for the benefit of others. It’s for their upbuilding; encouragement; and consolation.

There-you-go, there’s **3** words, that describe the purpose of Prophecy:

Upbuilding: It helps to develop our faith, and to shape us into disciples of Jesus.

Encouragement: – I might have to explain this one a bit...
We live in a society where we can't say anything negative about anybody, and every kid gets a prize – or an encouragement award, even if it means they were naughty 29 days in the last month – they just weren't as naughty today...

And we tend to think of encouragement as “Oh, you’re doing OK”....

The Greek word παράκλησιν (paraklesin), means “encouragement” “exhortation” — It’s an “urging on”. It’s a “Prodding on”...

Like:

- “How do you encourage the sheep into the catching pen?”
- “How do you encourage the cattle up the loading ramp, and into the crate?”

I think that’s more akin the kind of encouragement we’re talking about... Prophecy urges us on. It pushes us on...

Upbuilding; encouragement; and (the third one)

Consolation: Prophecy gives us comfort in our time of need; It consoles us; it cheers us...

And that’s why we should desire the gift of Prophecy – because it benefits others:

- It builds **them** up in the faith

- It **urges** them on when they **need** urging on; and
- It **comforts** them in a time of need...

But I want to be really clear: it's not the gift itself that does these things...

- This is how God builds us up;
- This is how God urges us on;
- This is how God gives us words of comfort...

At least, it's one way that He does it. (He also does it through the Scriptures)

3. Which brings us to Point #3.

I suspect a fair bit of what gets 'passed off' as prophecy today, is actually pretend ('cold reading'). But the **true** gift of prophecy, is God speaking through his prophets. And we'll talk a bit more about 'cold reading', later in the message.

4. Fourthly, prophecy is a sign for believers – not for unbelievers.

So, if you're a Christian, prophecy is a sign for you... How?

V24 says: ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

Now, that makes it sound like it's a sign for unbelievers than for believers... Not so...

What is the most amazing miracle, that God could do in our presence here this morning? I'll tell you what... An unbeliever, being so convicted, he falls on his face, worshipping God, and declaring, "God is here. He's in you lot..."

Hey??? What would that do for your faith???

5. But this also brings us to our 5th point: Prophecy, is **more** than preaching.

Sometimes we muddle our terms up a bit. We will usually call what I'm doing now "Preaching" – "Michael's the preacher for today"... And usually I will do a **bit** of preaching in my message, but usually, most of what I do when I'm speaking in a church setting, is "teaching". Today I'm teaching about prophecy. But when I proclaim Jesus Christ (either to a believer or an unbeliever), and urge them 'into' faith, or urge them 'on in' the faith, that's more "preaching"...

And **often**, teaching, will be combined with preaching. And that's why we so often muddle them up.

And Prophecy, is also often combined with preaching. But prophecy isn't **only** preaching.

Prophecy, is where God reveals a message to someone. Sometimes it might be a new revelation, about his will and purpose (for an individual, or a church). Sometimes it will be an affirmation (or an application) of what we already know from the Scriptures.

Let me give you a couple of examples of New Testament prophecy:

In Acts 13, through the gift of prophecy, Paul and Barnabas were selected for a particular mission... But **we** know through the Scriptures, that we're **all** called to the mission of God. So, what's different here? Well, through the gift of Prophecy, The Lord revealed a **particular** call, of **specific** people (Paul and Barnabas), to a **specific** mission... He took the general call, and through prophecy, made it specific.

In 1st Timothy, Chapters 1 & 4, Paul reminds Timothy of the prophetic call that **he** had received... What an encouragement hey, when things are getting tough, to be reminded, that God had spoken through a prophet, to send Timothy on that mission. And Timothy could be assured, that he was leading that church, not by his own will, but at the direction of God...

*And personally, (for me) prophecies through dreams and visions, have been a great encouragement to me over the years... And so God calls us **all** to ministry (not just me – you too), but for me specifically, how do I know that the ministry of Bush Disciples, is where God wants me ministering???*

I believe it began as a prophetic word for me, which was then affirmed by a prophetic vision by somebody else... And so, I have complete confidence, that until God gives me new marching orders, I know, that I'm where God wants me to be...

Alright, so that's a few examples of how, through the gift of prophecy, God reveals a particular call, to a particular ministry.

But the gift of prophecy, can also (as God wills) give us insight into the future.

Does anyone here, know a chap by the name of "Agabus"?

Agabus makes 2 appearances in the book of Acts.

Acts 11:²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). ²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Alright, so God revealed (through Agabus), that there was going to be a famine, and so they were able to get together some relief, and send it to the Christians living in Judea... Isn't that beautiful – being able to provide for the needs of their Christian Brothers and Sisters, even before the famine began...

And then in Acts 21

¹⁰ While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming

to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' "

¹² When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

¹⁵ After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.

My-oh-my... The name-it-and-claim-it fraternity – the word faith movement, wouldn't welcome Agabus into their churches, would they.... Both of his prophecies (recorded in the book of Acts) were not tidings of glad joy, were they??? :

- There's going to be a famine;
- Paul's going to be bound and imprisoned.

You know, there are some Christians out there, who believe that the power is in our own words.... They talk about how with the words we use, we either bless or we curse...

And if Agabus had given his prophecy in one of those churches, somebody would probably jump up and say "I

negate those words in the name of Jesus”... Because they’d say, “Oh, Agabus, you’re putting a curse on Paul...” Don’t say bad things about him... Say good stuff... What a load of rubbish...

6. You see, prophecy **is** for the purpose of encouragement, but it won’t always be encouragement from a fleshly perspective... **Prophecy is always an encouragement to the spiritual person – but it’s not always so encouraging to a fleshly person.**

Even the prophecy, that Paul was going to be bound and imprisoned – some saw it as something to be avoided – Paul saw it as an encouragement...

Some tried to talk Paul out of going up to Jerusalem – “We don’t want you in prison”... But Paul had the Spiritual perspective “I don’t care if I go into prison. I’m ready to die for Jesus.”

But can’t you see, that Paul would’ve been so greatly encouraged, when he was bound in chains and in prison, to know that God knew – to know that God’s plan hadn’t all gone to putty, and that God was still in control...

OK, so the Gift of Prophecy, isn’t only preaching. It can give us specific direction in following God. It **can** (if God wills) give us insights into the future, and it’s **always** an encouragement to the Spiritual man – not so much for the fleshly one.

So, how should the Gift of prophecy be used?

7. Well, the gift of prophecy, is not something to be taken lightly...

In Rom 12, it says: **if a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith...** It takes a lot of faith, to know that God has a message for you to share with another.

8. But if you believe you have a gift of prophecy, **only share that word, if you are certain it's from God...**

This is **very** important, because if you share something as a word from God, and it's **not** from God, that can be terribly destructive.

9. And for this reason, God builds safeguards into the church, to protect us from false prophecy. V29 talks about using the gift of prophecy in a church setting: ²⁹ **Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.**

1 Thessalonians 5:¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil.

Alright, so how **do** we weigh what a prophet says? How **do** we test everything?

1. Well, the first and most obvious test, is “scripture”. If a prophecy is from God, it will **never** contradict scripture... e.g.

If someone says to you, “Jesus is returning on such-and-such-a day, don’t believe them, because Jesus told us, we won’t know the hour, or the day.”

If somebody brings a prophecy and says “God says it’s OK to lie, in this particular situation, because it will cause less offence.”,, That is a word from a false prophet, because the Scriptures consistently teach us, that lying, is always evil.

2. A second way it’s tested, is by other prophecies... If prophecies are from God, they will be consistent.
3. Thirdly, a prophet can be tested by the content of his character. If a prophet is operating in the power of the Holy Spirit, then his character should display the fruit of Spirit.

Matthew 7:¹⁵ **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognise them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from**

thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognise them by their fruits.

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Alright, so a godly prophet will be living a Godly life. And so I reckon it's important, that when it comes to the gift of prophecy, don't be too quick to receive someone as a prophet... We cannot receive someone as a prophet, until we know them well enough to know the content of their character.

4. Fourthly, there's a very important Spiritual gift, called the Gift of discernment. Those who have the gift of discernment, will just know...

While some people are getting very excited about a certain prophet, or a certain prophecy, others (those with the gift of discernment) will be feeling anxious or

disturbed, even to the point of feeling sick inside, because they just know, that this person is not speaking for God...

And as a church, we need to learn to listen to those who have the gift of discernment. And those with the gift of discernment, need to exercise their faith (and speak up!), and share their concerns with the body. The gift of discernment, isn't only for the individual – it's so the whole body can know if someone is true or false.

Some false prophets operate from the power of Satan. Others use a skill called “cold reading”.

Did anybody here used to watch the TV show called “The Mentalist”? Cold reading, is what he did... He had trained himself to pick up on cues about a person (stuff that most people wouldn't notice), and he was able to tell them stuff about themselves, and he could pass himself off as being psychic, because “Wow, how could you possibly know that?”

And I actually suspect, that a lot of what passes for prophecy today, is “Cold reading”... I've seen it done (here in this town, when a so-called prophet was brought to town to prophesy at a particular church)... And I'm certain, all he was doing, was cold-reading those who went forward for prophecy, and then telling, exactly what they wanted to hear... And you know, every message that I heard him give, was a message that would appeal to the flesh:

- God is going to make you a leader
- God is going to give you a wife
- God is going to take away all your financial troubles

- God is about to break through in that area that you've been praying for, for so long.

.....

False prophets will usually tell us what we want to hear, and their message will very often be quite appealing to the flesh.

Do you know why the devil so big on false prophecy??? Because he wants us to get so burned by false prophecy, that we will never recognise true prophecy. God gives us something good; The Evil One perverts it – he mimics it and distorts it with his lies.... And because false prophecy is so destructive, it scares us away, from prophecy altogether...

But you good, 'bible-believing' Christians, I want to urge you to remember what the Scripture says:

- Eagerly desire the gift of prophecy
- Don't despise prophecy
- Let 2 or 3 prophets speak in church, but test what they say...

Where are the 2 or 3??? Who are the 2 or 3, who will bring a word from the Lord to us today???

If you believe God has given a message to you, to share with someone else, I don't know about you, but I reckon I'd be scared witless:

- What if I was wrong.
- What if they don't accept what I say.

- How will I look?
- What if... What if... What if...????

It takes a lot of faith to prophesy. But if God has given you that gift, He's given it, for the purpose of building up the church.

Does God speak to you? Does God tell you stuff through words; or mind pictures; or dreams; or through scriptures? Does He tell you stuff that's going to happen and then it does? If so, then the Lord may be developing in you, a gift of prophecy.

You need to pray about it, and ask the Lord to guide you in how to use that gift.

And remember, prophecy is a ministry of the church. If you believe God is developing the gift of prophecy in you, talk to me about it, or talk to the elders about it.

And likewise, if you believe that you can see the gift of prophecy in someone else, encourage them – that's part of building each other up.

The gift of prophecy – Eagerly desiring & Carefully discerning.

Questions: