

## Why do we Prophecy?

We've talked about why we Pray (and pray for healing)... we gave out prayer cards that week and I wonder has anyone tried using them yet???

We've also looked at why we read the Bible and why we Sing, today I want us to think about Prophecy. Why do we Prophecy? Maybe you think straight away, well I am not sure we do(?) or what on earth does that mean(?)... well it is a bit like prayer, but the listening part not the talking part!

Have you ever wondered, when Jesus was in Jericho, (Lk 19) how he knew to go over to the particular Sycamore tree that little Zacchaeus the tax collector was in? Or for that matter how Jesus knew that the man in the tree was called Zacchaeus?

Have you ever wondered, when Jesus was by the well in Sychar (a Samaritan town), how he knew the woman who came to draw water had had 5 husbands?

Some might say, Oh well He was God so he obviously knew... the trouble with that is the Bible (Phil 2) tells us that Jesus emptied himself of equality with God. He gave up his divine advantages in order to live this life like us, in every way like us - except without sin.

If that is so, and I believe it is, then he relied on his Father guiding him through the work of the Holy Spirit.

If Prayer is our talking to God, then Prophecy is this whole area of communication from God, it is letting God speak to us (as we see Jesus modelling) or being open to Him speaking to us via someone else.

It is part of our Christian heritage, but a very neglected part - perhaps because we are unsure of the supernatural aspect?

Professor Jack Deere, who used to believe that God would only speak through the scriptures, writes: "Whether we are 8 years old or 80, whether in an encounter in a home group, in a meeting with a prophet or in a luminous visit in our bedroom, God is pursuing us. He wants to make prophets out of some of us, but ultimately he wants to make friends out of all of us, friends who are fascinated by the mystery and adventure of His holy love.

They are great words, to call us back to the expectation of God speaking to us and to the reality of our being in relationship with the Living God.

Please hear what I am saying, none of this de-values or displaces the Bible. The authoritative voice of God is still heard through the Bible. Modern day prophecy is not the same as scripture.

But the Living God whose voice we hear in the Bible is still living and His desire is fellowship/relationship with us!

Some Christians are called especially to be prophets, just as some are called especially to be evangelists. But just as all can share the good news about Jesus, so all can be involved in prophecy.

So we heard the words from Joel ch2 <sup>28</sup> And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

Words that Peter uses to help people understand the Day of Pentecost and to set believer's expectations for what should be the normal Christian experience.

We also heard very familiar words from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians ch13 words that are chosen for almost 9 out of 10 weddings these days.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. <sup>8</sup> Love never fails.

That's the straightforward bit, people think and then comes the odd bit... But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

Well what is that about - some say it is about the canon of scripture being completed - but it seems to me it is suggesting that the gifts of tongues and prophecy and knowledge are not an end in themselves but rather the means to an end... the means to get to know God.

<sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

<sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

He is looking forward to the time when we shall see God face to face, when all will be known and clear and faith hope and love will be truly realized... then <sup>13</sup> these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

That is a great point to look forward to, but we are not there yet. It would be weird to suggest we are, and a tragedy if at that point we close our Bibles, because St Paul is still speaking, indeed he is about to sum up on his famous Ch13 and there is a lot more to come on the subject of spiritual gifts and prophecy in particular. Ch14 <sup>1</sup> Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

It's no good just hearing great words about love, no we are told we must "follow the way of love." But that is not all... we are also to "eagerly desire spiritual gifts" and "especially the gift of prophecy."

I hate to think how many times I had read or heard 1st Corinthians ch13 before I ever discovered 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians ch14... and maybe that is the same for some of you this morning?

And yet, what we are talking about could equally well come under the heading of "Prayer" and the whole aspect of letting God speak to us.

It is not much fun having a conversation with someone who will not let you get a word in edgeways... so why should we be surprised at the idea of God wanting to talk to us? It makes perfect sense.

We are also very familiar with the idea of the Church being compared to a Vine or a Body... the whole thing being interconnected and depending on the other bits.

Well, again, it makes sense that God would speak to us for the benefit of others within the Vine or Body so that the whole is helped by the parts.

We see <sup>3</sup> Those who prophesy speak to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. <sup>4</sup> Those... who prophesy edify the church. And St Paul says <sup>5</sup> I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy.

This is not strange or outmoded teaching, but mainstream clear apostolic instruction that we need to do something about. But yes there are rules - the words given must be for **strengthening, encouragement and comfort.**

There is no remit given for negative or critical people to use the guise of prophecy to grind their own particular axe.

So, I wonder, does the idea of God speaking to you excite you or concern you? Does the idea thrill you or threaten you? Would you like to be strengthened, encouraged and comforted every now and then???

My experience of being on the receiving end of other people's prayer and prophecy has been almost universally a good one. It has confirmed God's knowledge of me and care for me and definitely strengthened me to keep going.

My experience of prophesying for others is relatively new and is a learning experience, that of learning to listen. Most human beings need help to tune in and I have been helped by those who have been tuning in for longer and using the faith waveband.

If this is all new to you, but it sounds good... or if you have been praying a long time, but find it hard to listen, in the New Year we will be running some workshops to help those who would like to sharpen their listening skills... please let me know if that includes you and what time would work for you?