

### **The Speaking Gifts: Prophecy, tongues and interpretation...**

1 Cor 12:1-11, 1 Cor 14:26-33, 39-40

Friends, in our December sermon series we've been focusing on how we anticipate receiving gifts for Christmas, because it's a useful way to help us eagerly desire spiritual gifts – or grace-gifts – from the Holy Spirit.

Since we normally have a wish list of what we might like to get for Christmas right? – so... why not develop a list of grace-gifts that we might ask the Holy Spirit to give to us as well?

Because grace-gifts are what empowers the church to accomplish the great commission which our Lord gave us - the task of making disciples of all nations, and grace-gifts ensure that we remain “the church” as we go about doing this - instead of becoming something else.

So friends I hope that as we look at different gifts this month – you're starting to get intrigued by them, maybe getting excited about them, and hopefully you're deciding that you want to ask for some of them.

Maybe the gift of healing, perhaps the gift of discerning the spirits – or what about the gifts of prophecy or the gift of tongues or the gift of interpreting tongues which were mentioned in our scripture readings today? What about these “speaking gifts?”

And if we continue comparing regular Christmas gifts to grace-gifts - then in this case, when I think about the desirability of the speaking gifts... I think about how much more I wanted a toy for Christmas when that toy had the ability to make sounds or speak words.

I mean it was just so much more realistic and more fun to play with a toy police car or fire truck that looked and sounded just like the real thing, or if your doll could cry... or say “mommy I love you” – that was just so awesome.

And who can forget “tickle-me Elmo?” Remember Elmo-mania? Back in 1996 this talking stuffed toy was so popular that shoppers were fighting and rioting in the stores to try and purchase one for their kids – all because he giggled when you tickled him with a cute, adorable little laugh.

Now it was a bit over the top for a toy, I know – but... when I was growing up if a toy could talk it was so much more desirable.

Perhaps it was the same for you... or for your kids? Perhaps it still is – after all why else would Apple invent Siri – we can easily read the information off the phone – why does it have to talk back to us? Because it makes it more desirable...

But I wonder – does this same dynamic apply when it comes to grace-gifts that empower us to speak? Are we “eager to prophesy,” and would we encourage “speaking in tongues?”

I’ll let you think about that for a moment – as I go back to the talking about the toy analogy and look at it from a parent’s perspective.

From a parent’s perspective talking toys - well... we love to see our kids excited to receive them but the novelty wears off pretty quickly for us as we hear those sounds and phrases repeated over and over and over again.

They can even be a bit unsettling and scary – since you don’t exactly know what sets them off – right?

You’re downstairs in the play room, tidying up late at night, and you toss a few items into the toy bin and suddenly you hear “I love you mommy - a hahahahaha!” And you just about jump out of your skin!

So from a parent’s perspective toys that talk – well, they can be annoying and a bit freaky.

And friends the truth is that in many churches, in many denominations – for many people the whole idea of grace-gifts that empower us to speak is a bit freaky and/or annoying.

In my experience most believers will acknowledge that these speaking gifts are listed in the bible... just like parents know that those talking toys are in the store...

But, secretly they hope nobody is asking for these gifts, they hope they don't show up in a worship service, and they certainly wouldn't ask to receive them for themselves.

But yet Paul says to the Corinthians and to us *“be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues”* (1 Cor 14:39)

So – if we are asking for grace-gifts this Christmas we can't say “well we'd be happy to receive the grace-gift of healing, but not the grace gift of tongues...”

Nor can we say that “we'd feel comfortable receiving the grace-gift of discerning the spirits but we're not interested in getting the grace-gift of prophecy.”

Because as 1 Cor 12:11 puts it *“all these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”*

While we might ask for certain gifts it's not our decision about what we get or don't get – the Holy Spirit is God after all and

we're not and we need to be open to receive what He knows is best for us – and for the church that we are part of.

Not to mention that neglecting certain grace-gifts means the church won't be making use of all the tools that are available to it...

And friends, any church that makes a serious effort to reach their surrounding community with the gospel will very quickly realize that we need every tool we've been given for this task! We need all hands on deck.

And any church that makes a genuine effort to help people grow as disciples of Jesus Christ will quickly realize that it takes much more than occasionally attending church to make any sort of progress in our Christian walk – do you know what I mean?

so Friends - even though we might find them freaky and annoying or just plain irrelevant when it comes to making a difference in our world, the church needs **all** of the gifts operational and being used – including the gifts of tongues and the gift prophecy.

Now, you might wonder how the speaking gifts help the church make a difference in our world?

At first glance they don't appear to be much help in reaching out into the world through practical ministry efforts such as helping the poor, protecting the environment, or advocating for social justice and so on -

And scripture even says that faith without deeds is dead – James 2:15 *“If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?”*

So how does prophecy and tongues help the church accomplish the very practical, hands on work which Jesus came to do and is described in Luke 4.

Well let's take a look at the passage that Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, it says;

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim*

*freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

(Luke 4:18-19)

Friends did you happen to hear how the good news for the poor, release for captives, recovery of sight, freedom for the oppressed and God's favor is going to come about?

Was it through organization? Was it through protesting? Was it by legislation? No, it is through proclamation!

Jesus was sent to proclaim good news, proclaim freedom, to proclaim God's favor...

And if we desire to see these wonderful things Isaiah talks about happen in the lives of people in this world around us... if we want to be a part of helping make that happen – then we need the grace-gift of prophecy - because those wonderful things begin with proclamation.

This is what prophecy is about friends... proclamation of what God wants to do and intends to accomplish in this world... and it is spoken into reality, because when God speaks – things happen.

God also tells us through Isaiah that <sup>10</sup> *“as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”* (Isaiah 55:10-11)

That’s why the Apostle Paul says *“For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk – but of power!”* (1 Cor 4:20)

Prophecy is when the power of the Holy Spirit works through the words we speak to bring about God’s purposes.

Proclamation of God purposes is empowered and made effective by the Holy Spirit. That’s why the passage in Isaiah says *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, he has anointed me...”*

Those who are anointed by the Holy Spirit to speak – or in other words have received the grace-gift of prophecy or proclamation... they speak God’s Word with certainty and conviction, with power and results.

They are not “fortune tellers” or “psychics” or “futurists...” instead they are ordinary believers who receive messages from the Holy Spirit for specific people and/or situations.

They communicate and make known to us what God wants to accomplish in our lives and in our church and through speaking it they help to bring it about.

You see friends we can talk all we want and nothing much will happen from it...

But, when the grace gift of prophecy is being used – then our talk becomes proclamation and it is empowered and it works! It produces results because it is not really our words being spoken but the Word of God.

You may have experienced this yourself when you've listened to someone speaking and sharing their faith, or explaining the scriptures or just giving you some advice or encouragement – suddenly you just know what they are saying isn't just them saying it – God is speaking to you!

And when the grace-gift of prophecy is active in the church, those who have it are intentional about speaking God's Word into the lives of other people to bless them, to build up their faith in Jesus, to confront and challenge, and to release God's power into their lives to bring about results.

Are you starting to get a better grasp of what Prophecy is about? How it functions in the church, and do you understand why we ought to be eager to prophesy?

Would you be more open to asking to receive the gift of prophecy? Certainly I hope you will be praying that your pastor is given more and more of this grace-gift.

And if we are becoming eager to prophesy then we must also – as Paul writes - not forbid the use of the gift of tongues.

Now this ironic for us friends, because Paul wrote this verse to address the situation in the Corinthian church - the gift of speaking in tongues was becoming the primary focus of the worship service - and prophecy or proclamation was being neglected.

Paul needed to correct the imbalance – but in doing so did not want the Corinthians to think that he was telling them to completely stop using the gift of tongues in worship.

Today we have the reverse situation – we have a very high view of preaching and teaching of God's word which is part of the gift of prophecy, but now the gift of tongues is neglected in our churches.

Now there are many reasons why this gift is neglected.

Some people think that in our modern age the “supernatural stuff” in the bible doesn’t happen anymore, others have had a bad experience with people who speak in tongues or seen it being misused, there also happens to be a lot of incorrect theology that has developed around it...

But it’s mostly neglected because we don’t really understand this gift or how it operates to build up the church, or how it might be of benefit us.

So what is the grace-gift of tongues?

Simply put, it is the ability to communicate directly with God in your spirit through a language which you don’t know and have never learned. It may be an angelic language or another human language – as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13: 1 *“I may speak in the tongue of men or angels...”*

But that’s it... that is the grace-gift of tongues. That’s not so scary is it?

In fact when we realize that it’s about ordinary believers experiencing intimate spiritual communication with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the gift of tongues can be seen as a naturally supernatural way that any of us could respond to God.

And I hope this realization moves us to consider that the gift of tongues could be a legitimate means for us to experience more intimacy with God; and we might even think to ask for it...

or at the very least it should make us more comfortable with other believers experiencing this intimacy and being able to share what they receive through it with the rest of us.

Now – if you’re still a bit unnerved by the gift of tongues - but you recognize its importance for the rest of body then perhaps you might consider asking for the grace-gift of interpreting tongues.

Because the church also needs those who are able to interpret what is being communicated in the gift of tongues in order it might be shared with the rest of the church during worship.

Remember the gift of tongues is a natural supernatural response that will often occur during prayer and worship – that's its natural setting, but Paul clearly teaches us that it is only helpful in worship when it can be interpreted – so that gift of interpretation is sorely needed.

Now if the idea of tongues in worship is stretching you I understand – we're not used to it.

But it might help, if you think about a particular worship service that moved you. If you reflect on a time that in worship where you felt the presence of God in a very powerful way?

And then consider... would it not be right, would it not be fitting, to be able to share the spiritual communication of tongues that occurs between God and his children so that a time of worship might be enhanced and become more intimate for everyone participating in it?

Proverbs 25:11 says *"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver."*

Friends, worship is already a beautiful thing – a setting of silver... adding a message from the gift of tongues and or prophecy; words fitly spoken... is like adding apples of gold – it's appropriate and adds to the beauty of what is going on.

Back in my university days we used to hold worship services for the students in the main foyer on the campus – and I remember one time how someone spoke in tongues at a very appropriate point in the service and someone interpreted with the message...

And while my memory is vague on the details about when this occurred in the service and who actually spoke and interpreted the message – I remember the message very clearly and it has stayed with me to this day.

The message was this: "Jesus longs to be with His children, and that He can't wait to be with you again one day"

And that made an impact on me, to receive a message from the one we were worshipping that He longs to be with us in person, to see us face to face – and it made me realize how real Jesus'



love for us actually is, and its why I will often say to you that God is glad that you have come to worship.

Because He is – I know it, and I proclaim it you when we gather here, to speak God’s love and power into your life because it is the truth. Christ himself told me... through the gifts from His Holy Spirit – so that we may all be built up.

So friends – I hope that through this message this morning – the Holy Spirit has spoken to you.

I pray that he has worked through the words I’ve spoken so that it hasn’t been just talk but that His power has been working in you to reveal how attractive these speaking gifts are.

So that you may truly be eager to prophesy, and that we would not forbid or neglect the use of tongues as freaky or annoying but we embrace it to experience more of God.

Because friends, its Christmas time – it’s time to give and receive gifts, so why not ask for some grace-gifts, put them on your Christmas wish list...

And ask our Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus, that the Holy Spirit would empower you with these speaking gifts – or whatever gifts are still needed here at Valleyview to empower us to proclaim the good news to our surrounding community and succeed in our mission to make disciples of all nations.

Let’s pray...