

## The Heart of Prophecy *Jesus Talk* 14.6.20 John 7:37-39; Rev 19:1-10

**Audio:** <https://www.daleappleby.net/index.php/mp3-sermons/51-recent-sermons/1038-the-heart-of-prophecy>

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--gyLch5Oe0>

### Introduction

As a new Christian my attention was seized by two teachings by Geoff Bingham. One was on the plan of God in Ephesians 1, the other was a booklet, *Is Prophecy for Today?*, The latter argued that the prophetic ministry was always indispensable to the health of the Church because prophets declare the saving plan of God (Am 3:7-8 cf. Isa 48:3-8). This provided me with a framework for understanding prophecy vastly different from what I had been taught in Pentecostalism. This framework has progressively shaped my life across the decades. Prophets are people with a sense of the true dimensions of the life of Christ, [especially in his humanity], and whose life vision is to see the Lord Jesus “magnified...whether by life or by death” (Phil 1:20 KJV). The prophetic awareness imparts an invaluable sense to the Church that what we are seeing and hearing from the Lord is infinitely greater than ourselves. Prophets cannot tolerate miniaturised views of Jesus because they have an expansive vision of the Church in relation to the true magnitude of her Lord (Eph 1:22-23). Every Church problem can be traced back to a diminishing of Jesus.

For example, someone was speaking recently about a large church in Perth that has intentionally shifted from historic to progressive Christianity. Abandoning things like penal substitutionary atonement, the notion that Jesus took our place under God’s wrath on the cross. They are gripped by a vision of numerical expansion instead of growing upwards into Jesus the head, and “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). This is a tragic mistake, but the more “successful” they are in this vision the more they will be copied. God’s people need to learn to trust in a different form of knowing the kingdom of God than that which operates at the ordinary human level.

Every “born again” believer has a prophetic dimension to their life (Jer 31:33-34; Acts 2:17-18; 1 John 2:20, 27), we all have times when we just “know” that God is speaking to us, or even that Jesus is praying with us (Rom 8:26-27, 34; Heb 7:25). The realm of prophecy involves deep spiritual mysteries; even if these are not mysterious, Paul for example, talks about “interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual” (1 Cor 2:13). Prophetic awareness *is all about* entering ever more deeply into union with the life of God as Father, Son and Spirit. This means that at heart prophecy has nothing in common with accurate weather forecasting or clairvoyance (Deut 13:1-3), prophecy is the fruit of an *intense* relationship with Christ.

The Lord has been embarrassing me a lot lately and he did it again a few days ago. When I was lecturing at Tabor College I became intrigued by this prophecy by Pentecostal pioneer Smith Wigglesworth, “When the Word and the Spirit come together, there will be the biggest movement of the Holy Spirit that ... the world, has ever seen.” I constructed an entire theological unit on the relationship between the Spirit and the Word. As I was out praying this week I sensed the Lord saying that the course came to nothing because even though the Word is “the word of life” (John 6:68; Acts 5:20; Phil 2:16; 1 John 1:1) and the Spirit is the “Spirit of life” (Job 33:4; Isa 57:16; Rom 8:2, 10-11), I never treated what I was teaching as if my own life depended upon it. The Spirit-Word relationship isn’t something merely to be studied, it is life eternal.

This is a subject which can't be ignored because there is grief in the heart of God over a polarisation between Word-aligned churches (Conservative Evangelical) and Spirit-aligned congregations (Charismatic-Pentecostal). As if there could be such a split in the innermost life of God! As I have prayed about *how* such a division could occur, I sense we are faced with an idolatry of the Bible on one hand and an idolatry of powerful spiritual encounters on the other side. Both lead to attempts to master the ways of the Lord. I need to speak of the relationship between the Word and the Spirit in more depth.

### **The Spirit and the Word Reveal the Father**

The unique Christian testimony, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), means, in context, that the Father is love. The only means of knowing that God is love is to share in the communion that Jesus shared with the Holy Spirit to the glory the Father (John 5:26). The love of God is mediated to us through his plan laid out in the words of scripture which point to Jesus (John 5:39) and are revealed by the Spirit. This is why the testimony of Jesus and the witness of his Spirit in our innermost being is the heart of prophecy. In prayer, sharing the communion with the Word and Spirit prophets know themselves to be a vital part of God's plan by unfolding this plan to the people of God. In union with Christ they know they are sharing in the Spirit's witness as they call God's people into an ever-deeper immersion in his life.

I have a folder containing various prophetic messages given to me and Donna from across the years. It is tragedy that none of them, accurate as some of them are, speak deeply of the Fatherhood of God. Mature prophecy functions as a mouthpiece of God (1 Peter 4:10) so people hear the Father; this is at the heart of prophecy (cf. John 1:18; 14:9-10). As the Spirit knew he was sent by God (Ps 104:30; Zech 7:12; John 14:26; 1 Pet 1:12; Rev 5:6) and as Christ testified that the Father sent him (John 5:23; 36-37 etc.), so a mature prophetic voice is utterly inwardly persuaded that what they have to say *must come from the innermost being of God*. Today however we live in times when powerful prophetic gifts exist alongside relational immaturity. I have observed, for example, when prophets try to "pastor" churches the church is degraded. Then there are prophets who only encourage and never correct, or prophets, once a big sin of mine, who correct in anger. We desperately need a reformation of the prophetic gift. All the people of God are called to share in a prophetic mode of life; filled with the Spirit all are called to live in such a way that others can see Jesus is the centre of all things (Col 1:16). I think functioning prophetic congregations are very rare in our day because we have had very few prophets of the cross.

### **The Cross as the Key to the Prophetic Life**

The cross is the place where Christ's own prophetic ministry (Deut 18:15; Acts 3:22; 7:37) is perfected. We see hints of this in Hebrews account of the agonies of Gethsemane. "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek." (5:7-10). Since prayer is a sign of the needs of our humanity to *live* "by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matt 4:4) the earnestness of Christ's blood, sweat and tears in prayer in the Gethsemane (Luke 22:44) are a sign he was radically conscious of totally depending on the Father as a frail, mortal human being. This consciousness reaches its limit on the cross.

The cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) means a painful split has opened up in Jesus' self-awareness as God and man. Whereas he could previously confront his opponents with complete boldness, ""Truly, truly, I say to you, before

Abraham was, I am.”” (John 8:58), now he is shaken to the very core of his being through the lack of his intimacy with God as his everlasting Father. He seems to be God without God.. Here, Jesus accepts what everyone who has lost the glory of God (Rom 3:23) has refused to accept. No one has anything to *say* of weight or authority apart from fellowship with the glorious Father in the power of the Spirit. Christ knows that only this communion makes him to be the God-man/Word of God that he truly is and lacking it he is totally desperate for spiritual renewal.

This utterly painful awareness shattering the communion of the Son of God with the Spirit and the Father is for *our* sanctification. It qualifies Jesus to communicate to us that total dependency upon God for his words, is the key to eternal life (John 6:68). In union with Christ *the* Prophet, prophets know that the Spirit and the Word are more than life itself and that seeing and hearing from the Lord is life’s highest priority. The prayer I seek to live by is, “What is *important to God* in this situation? There is nothing worthwhile outside of the communion with Word and Spirit to the glory of the Father. To suggest otherwise is the essence of evil. I need to go deeper on this in quite a specific way.

### **The Bridal Context**

Our reading from Revelation contains what I think is the most elevated text on prophecy in scripture, “And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” 10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the *testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.*” (Rev 19:9-10). The apostle John, who in his right mind knows that to worship an angel is an act of idolatry, is so overcome by the magnificence of the scene set before him that the glory of God in the angel’s witness overpowers him. The startling truth that is at the heart of the prophetic witness is that the Lamb, “standing as slain” (Rev 5:6) “from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8) is a Husband. A Husband without beginning or end with a Wife as ordinary as the 7 churches of whom the Spirit has spoken so clearly in the early chapters of Revelation, a weak, sinful and incomplete Wife, like us.

Mature prophets see the Beauty of the Lord in his Bride and have a vision of her future unlimited all-glorious self. This is what Jesus is always speaking and calling the Church to be. What the prophets share with Jesus, the Spirit and angels is that they each bears witness to someone they love more than themselves. This love is seen in bringing glory to the one they love, whatever the cost.

[Jesus identifies the Spirit as the one who will “bear witness concerning me:” (John 15:26). And it is only when Jesus is glorified by being empowered for crucifixion and resurrection by the Spirit (John 7:39; Rom 8:11; Heb 9:14) that he can be poured out by Christ himself (Acts 2:33).] [As far as his relationship with humans goes, whom he can now indwell and fill and bring to perfection in the plan of God, we could say that the Spirit himself has become more glorious than ever because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.]

The sacrificial love of the Lamb of God for the Church shows that Christ has loved us more than himself (Eph 5:25). The real question is, do we love Jesus more than ourselves (Matt 10:37-39; Luke 14:26)? The potency of the prophetic witness to Jesus as the Spirit of prophecy is that prophets keep reorienting the Church to her marital bonds of exclusive devotion to Christ (2 Cor 11:1-3), whatever the cost to their own lives. Since throughout scripture the prophets suffer, usually at the hands of the unfaithful people of God (Matt 23:29-36; 1 Pet 1:10-11), they are the archetypal witnesses who “conquer” the devil “by the

blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” (Rev 12:11).

### **Prophecy as Intimacy**

A Church without functioning prophets will always fail to understand that God’s plan from the beginning (cf. Eph 5:32) has been to have a company of saints “perfect in holiness” (2 Cor 7:1) fit to enjoy his presence forever in Marriage to his Son. The prophetic *life* is a sharing in the intimacy of the Lamb and the Spirit for the sake of the Wedding ordained by the Father. As such, the prophetic life brings with it an intimacy that involves joy, love, anticipation, longing and much heartbreak (Rom 8:26). The prophetic life is a life forged through the depths of shared cross-like sufferings, lived in resurrection power (Phil 3:10; 2 Cor 4:7-12). All who live like this can resonate with and repeat from their hearts the very last plea of the Bible, “The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.”” (Rev 22:17).

### **Conclusion**

No one who desires to bear witness to Jesus can say about the prophetic life, “That’s not me.” No one who has been saved by Christ’s blood should refuse to be a prophet of the cross. The reason we hesitate about these properties of the normal Christian life is that our vision of Christ is too small. This restriction is hemming Jesus, but thankfully Jesus “way out” is to immerse us more deeply immersed in the shape of the Gospel. What do I mean by “the shape of the gospel”? As the Spirit was the powerful presence by which Jesus made himself nothing in Incarnation and crucifixion, and the energy by which his humanity was limitlessly expanded in resurrection and glorification (cf. Phil 2:5-11), so the power of the Spirit is the way forward for the Church today. An Spirit generated expansion of the Word of God, the presence of the life of Christ, in the Church (Eph 1:22-23; 4:12-13) will bring about an expansion in his Body, inwardly by the growing riches of our fellowship and outwardly by mission to the world. This must be the subject of our earnest prayers.