

## **Prophets and the Gift of God** *Jesus Talk* 19.7.20 Matt 25:14-30; 2 Cor 9:6-15

Audio: <https://www.daleappleby.net/media/podcastmanager/ProphGift.mp3>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhkKYyCV0KE>

### **Introduction**

Most of us here tonight could quote John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he *gave* his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” The evangelistically minded might lay the emphasis on the offer of salvation, but a prophetic insight is the revelation that in God giving us his Son the Father has given us all that he ever had to give. In the giving of Jesus, God gives God in an act of unsurpassable generosity unfathomable (Eph 3:8) to miserable sinners but stirring to the extreme. At the end of his long teaching on generosity to needy fellow believers, Paul is overcome by the presence of God and jumps out of his skin exclaiming, “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible/indescribable gift!” (ESV/NIV) “gift too wonderful for words” (NLT) (2 Cor 9:15). The gift he has in mind is the giving of Jesus. The greater the revelation we have of what God giving Jesus means the more irrepressible/uncontainable our testimony to Jesus becomes (Rev 19:10). When threatened by those who had recently had Jesus crucified to be silent, the apostles replied, “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20). Prophets have a sense that what has been given in Jesus for a lost world *must* be communicated (Amos 3:8; 1 Cor 9:16 cf. Jer 20:9). Jesus words, “Freely you have received, freely give.” (Matt 10:8) are the inner dynamic of the Christian life (cf. Col 1:28-29). Knowing the totally free character of what has been given us in Christ that inspires us to give God the glory. The greater the gift the greater the glory. Since prophets are bearers of the mystery/secret of the plan of God they have deep insight into these things (Am 3:7 cf. Rom 16:25; Eph 1:9-10; 3:9; Col 1:26-27; 2:2; 1 Tim 3:16).

### **Trinity**

When we read at the start of John, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” We understand that in the Son of God becoming human that makes God Father (John 1:14; Rom 6:4) came to earth in the gift of Christ (Col 1:29; 2:9). When Jesus prayed with anticipation on the eve of his death, “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” (John 17:4-5), he was expounding how he would return *as a human being* to the dynamic giving and receiving that was eternally the life of God. God’s plan for creation was a design to reveal the Father as the Giver, through the Son as the Gift and the Holy Spirit as the One who Gives. To put this slightly differently, the Plan of God is for the Father to receive a vast family of sons/daughters in the exact likeness of Jesus (Rom 8:28-30), for the Son to receive a glorious Body and Bride through which he will express his life (Eph 1:22-23; Rev 19:6-9) and for the Holy Spirit to receive a temple of living stones as an eternal dwelling place (1 Cor 3:16; 1 Pet 2:5). But first things first.

### **Creation**

Part of the original goodness of creation (Gen 1:31) is that it is a pure gift to creatures (cf. Ps 104; 136:25; 145:15; 147:9). In preaching to pagans Paul adamantly testifies; “Yet he did not

leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness....he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 14:17; 17:25). In an age of so-called “identity politics” Christians need to uphold the truth that things like race and sex i.e. female/male, language and nation are good only *because* they are gifts from God the wise Creator (cf. Rev 7:9). If giving is a part of the glory of God in whose image we are created (Gen 1:26-28) freely giving back to God and to others is an essential part of our nature. A world of freely giving, and receiving to give even more, was the Lord’s wonderful harmonious Plan from the beginning. We all know the world is mostly not like that, and as hard-hearted selfish people conscious of our mortality we struggle to appreciate and live out the divine generosity. We have fallen from the glory of the divine likeness.

## **Fall**

I remember flying across the Pacific from Argentina in 1994 sensing the Lord speaking to me from the parable of the talents. The dialogue between the Master and the third servant goes like this. “He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ 26 But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant!’” (Matt 25:24-26). Despite our enormous God-endowed material abundance contemporary Australians are so twisted inside that we believe that God is a hard-hearted person who is a taker and not a Giver. We are a nation of those who “lay up treasure for themselves, and are not rich toward God.”” (Luke 12:21).

We exemplify the depravity which began in Eden where Eve and Adam believed the devil’s lie that God’s Word not to eat of the tree of knowledge was designed to deprive them of becoming more like him rather than keeping them in his presence. What happened next illustrates what scripture says, with the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.” Handed over to a spiritual blindness (cf. Rom 1:24, 26, 28) rich and selfish people can never appreciate the generosity of the Lord.

God may “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Tim 6:17) but treating the tree of knowledge as if it was created wasn’t given for our pleasure (Gen 3:6) began the long history of humanity grieving the Word and the Spirit. Only Jesus, God’s own unlimited Gift of himself, who would give all back to the Father, can save us.

## **Incarnation**

Christ’s fundamental self-identity is to know himself as God’s complete gift to the world. Jesus says to the Samaritan woman at the well, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10). Even more profoundly, he links the coming of the Spirit to the giving of his life; “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:37-39). The glorification of Jesus will come through his death (John 12:28-33), and resurrection. In saying, “the Son of

Man came not to be served but to serve, and to *give his life* as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45) Jesus means precisely what he says.

### **Cross**

In rich prophetic speech the cross is the place where the Servant of the Lord will “pour out his soul” (Isa 53:12) for our salvation. The death of the Son of God will break down the boundary between a generous Creator and a selfish humanity. The Lord challenged Job, “Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.” (41:11 cf. Rom 11:35). But as the sinless Son of God Jesus was under no obligation to offer himself as a sacrifice. His giving up of his life in our place (1 Pet 3:18) gives to the Father what we could/would never give. The cross is an act of sheer love where the faithful Son gives to the Father all the love we have failed to give him. (Human being loves as God loves, unconditionally.) This is something very important to my spiritual memory. When I first read the Bible as a depressed and lost 20-year-old I became irreversibly convinced that God had always loved me and that I had never loved him. I had never given him my whole life. But this is what Jesus did in my/our place on the cross.

Christ’s anguished cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34) signals he has lost consciousness that he is “the gift of God” and now can find in himself no resources of the Spirit or Word to give to others. His anguished, “I thirst” (John 19:28), means he is running on empty in a way we cannot plumb. This is the truth in a spiritual saying I will never forget, or in this life fully understand, “It’s not a matter of giving until it hurts, *but giving until it hurts not to be able to give more*”. (Bingham) As soon as I first heard this I knew it was true of the cross but untrue of me. In Christ’s sacrificial humanity God has given all it was possible for him to give. God is love, and the limitless giving of his love could only come in giving up of life in death. Praise the Lord, the cross was not the end.

### **Glorification**

Having given everything he had to give on the cross, the Father of glory (Rom 6:4) gave Jesus a new life in the Spirit in raising him from the dead and returning him to the eternal glory (John 17:5). Having given his own life in fullness/ *in toto* the exalted Jesus received the dignity and authority of God-likeness in its final form (cf. Phil 2:5-11) to give the Holy Spirit. True to his character, Jesus has “poured out” (Acts 2:33) and “baptised” people in the Spirit (Matt 3:11) from the Day of Pentecost on. This has remarkable implications for the Church.

### **Church**

From the earliest days the apostles promise to the repentant, “you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38 cf. Acts 5:32). In making such a grand promise Peter perfectly illustrated what he says decades later in his letter, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles/mouthpiece of God.; ...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Pet 4:10-11). Men and women will receive *God the Holy Spirit* through the (inspired) words of an ordinary human being. I doubt if any of us have come to terms with the glory of what is described throughout Acts when in evangelistic settings followers of Jesus lay their hands on people who receive the Holy Spirit, with tongues and prophecy (Acts 8:17-18; 9:17; 19:7). Other scriptures describe how various spiritual gifts for ministry were given through the laying on

of hands (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6 cf. Rom 1:11). To put the miracle bluntly, *God is no longer simply given by God i.e. Father gives Son in Spirit, but God gives God through the Church.*

When Paul outlines his vision of Spirit-filled culture in 1 Corinthians. “To each is *given* the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is *given* through the Spirit.... When you come together, *each one* has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.... you can *all* prophesy one by one” (1 Cor 12:7-8; 14:26), we see that the normal state of the Church is to be a hive of giving and receiving. The giving character of the Church is evidence in the world that Christ has been glorified for our salvation.

The Church may have been invaded by worldly principles, but Jesus Christ is still in heaven *giving* apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers who have much to *give* the Body of Christ for her maturing (Eph 4:8, 11-13). If we keep our eyes on the Lord in heaven (cf. Heb 12:2) as a gift to us a “gift too wonderful for words” (NLT) (2 Cor 9:15) we will not fail to receive his glorious riches to give to others.

### **Conclusion**

The more we realise we have been given, the more we are moved to give. Which is why Paul rebuked the selfish entitled Corinthians, “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor 4:7). How little we give. But the Spirit wants to *release in each of us a heart intention to give to a fulness beyond our unaided human capacity*. As always in Christ, there is a cost in this, “For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” (2 Cor 4:11). As Jesus ability to give was intensified through suffering for God’s kingdom, so is ours (Phil 3:10; Col 1:24).

Following Jesus isn’t about what’s in it for me but sharing in God’s gift of giving Christ to the world. This involves a supernatural reality. By being in-filled and empowered by the Spirit (cf. Heb 9:14) we are taken up into God’s Plan of communicating to lost humanity nothing less than eternal life. To receive the Spirit of the Lord (Luke 4:18ff.) more deeply into our hearts is to receive the Gift of giving to the glory of God the Father. In union with Christ we become part of God’s Gift to the world. This is a remarkable privilege and calling. As far as *Jesus Talk* is concerned the Spirit of God would surely fill each of us with a passion to give – including ways of giving we presently do not imagine are possible! I sense that Father, Son and Spirit are bursting to give *of themselves through us for* the world.