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Sermon Notes

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On Prophecy and Healings Today (2019)

1 Corinthians 12:7-13, 28

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus!!

A Christmas Hymn, written in 1744 by Charles Wesley... to prepare the hearts of people for Christmas... it speaks of the longing the Jewish people had for their Messiah to come and redeem them... a longing we Christians now share as we wait for the Second Coming of Christ

Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set thy people free
From our fears and sins release us
Let us find our rest in Thee
Israel's strength and consolation
Hope of all the earth Thou art
Dear desire of every nation
Joy of every longing heart

Why was Jesus "long-expected"? Because God TOLD the human race he would come! The eagle eye of prophecy was able to look ahead down the dark corridor of the long ages of human history by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit of God; the promises made for long ages past was fulfilled in the birth of Christ

Only by the supernatural gift of PROPHECY was Christ's birth long foretold...

One prophet, Balaam, spoke of the coming of Christ in powerful visionary language:

Numbers 24:17 "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.

Seven centuries before Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah beheld it and spoke with these powerful and familiar words:

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

At same time as Isaiah, another prophet named Micah even saw where Jesus would be born... the "little town of Bethlehem":

Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

It is this stunning power, the ability of prophets to SEE THE FUTURE which sets Christianity apart from every other religion in the world... and God alone has that power. No one knows the future except God, and those to whom God reveals the future — his servants the prophets. God makes this boast over against all the false gods that Israel was following... "I alone can tell the future":

Isaiah 41:22-24 "Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, ²³ tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. ²⁴ But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable.

The reason no one but God can foretell the future is that he is sovereign, and if someone makes a prediction and God says "It shall not take place, it shall not happen", then THAT SETTLES IT.

So fulfilled prophecies about Christ have always been the centerpiece of our apologetic to the skeptical world... no other religion has this feature... fulfilled prophecies. There are no Muslim prophecies, no Hindu prophecies, no Buddhist prophecies... and the prophecies of false religions like the Jehovah's Witnesses have proved false. But Christ was the LONG EXPECTED ONE, whose coming was foretold by the prophets long before he was born.

Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* lists **sixty-one prophecies** Christ fulfilled from His birth to His death. The theme of **promise-fulfillment** is a major one in the entire New Testament. Not counting Christ's own statements, **Matthew states ten times that something took place in Christ's life to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets**

The apostles learned this theme from the Master, Jesus Himself. Christ openly taught throughout His ministry that He was born, lived, would die and be raised to life, all in fulfillment of the Scriptures. He began his ministry in his hometown of Nazareth reading from the scroll of Isaiah

Luke 4: 21 "Today, in your hearing, this scripture is fulfilled."

So... this is how God used prophecy in the past to identify Jesus as the Christ, the Savior of the world... born the son of Abraham in fulfillment of prophecy, born the son of David in fulfillment of prophecy... crucified with his hands and feet pierced in fulfillment of prophecy, raised from the dead on the third day in fulfillment of prophecy. Since that time, the gospel has spread from Jerusalem, through Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth in fulfillment of prophecy. And someday, Christ will return to reign forever in fulfillment of prophecy. So he is STILL the "long-expected Jesus"

Now what does all this have to do with spiritual gifts? Well, we've been trying to answer one of the most controversial issues in evangelicalism today.

Last Week: We began to address the issues related to the “sign gifts” ... are all the gifts of the Spirit which are listed in 1 Corinthians 12 still valid and active today, or have some of them ceased?

We mentioned specifically the gift of prophecy, healing, miracles, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues... the so-called “sign gifts”

We spoke of the beginning of the Pentecostal and charismatic movement in Topeka, Kansas in 1900 and the Azusa Street Revival in 1906. We described the basics of the movement that for over a century has taken the world by storm... there are now an estimated 600 million charismatics worldwide

The existence of so many charismatic Christians has forced these issues on our consciousness and it is vital for us to address it and deal with it

We discussed the divide in evangelicalism between charismatics (continuationists) and cessationists... people who believe that the sign gifts have most certainly ended

We walked carefully through 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

This passage, far from teaching cessation at the end of the apostolic era, asserts that the gifts will end “when the perfect comes,” namely perfect, face to face knowledge of God after the Second Coming of Christ in eternity in heaven. This hints strongly at CONTINUATION of the spiritual gifts of prophecy and tongues.

But that leads to some significant questions about these gifts and how they functioned in the Bible and how they would function in the church after the apostolic age has ended.

This morning, I want to address prophecy and healing ... I will leave a fuller discussion of tongues to the time when we get to 1 Corinthians 14.

I. The Gift of Prophecy

A. The Beginning of the Office of Prophet

1. Abraham a Prophet (to the king of Gerar)

Genesis 20:7 Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die.

However, the word does not appear again in Genesis

2. Aaron to be Moses' prophet

Exodus 4:15 You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.

Key Moment: Mount Sinai

3. God speaking to the people; Moses to be the mediator

a. The people were terrified of God's voice

Deuteronomy 5:23-31 When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders came to me. ²⁴ And you said, "The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a man can live even if God speaks with him. ²⁵ But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. ²⁶ For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? ²⁷ Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey." ²⁸ The LORD heard you when you spoke to me and the LORD said to me, "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. ²⁹ Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever! ³⁰ "Go, tell them to return to their tents. ³¹ But you stay here with me so that I may give you all the commands, decrees and laws you are to teach them to follow in the land I am giving them to possess."

- b. This was the beginning of the office of the prophet in the nation of Israel... the pattern was established, with Moses the first

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." ¹⁷ The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹ If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. ²⁰ But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

4. The pattern continued

- a. God again and again raised up prophets and spoke directly to Israel through them
- b. The pattern is clear:
- i) The “word of the Lord” comes to a man
 - ii) He speaks whatever word God told him to say
 - iii) Like the little boy Samuel, who learned to say “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening”
 - iv) Samuel was like a table-waiter, bringing God’s words to the people

1 Samuel 3:19 The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground.

- c. So again and again, we have individuals who hear God speak words and who then speak those exact words to the people

Jeremiah 1:4-7 The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." ⁶ "Ah,

Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." ⁷ But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.

Jeremiah 1:9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth.

5. The varieties of prophetic communications

Hebrews 1:1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways

6. Many of the prophets were also called on to WRITE DOWN the words God had commanded them to say... this was the origin of scripture... the words of God written.

B. The Key Issue: Identification of a Prophet is by Fulfillment of His Words

Deuteronomy 18:21-22 You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" ²² If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

Jeremiah 28:9 [to the false prophet Hananiah, who predicted a very short exile] the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true.

Ezekiel 33:33 "When all this comes true-- and it surely will-- then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

C. My Own Description

An Old Testament prophet is an individual called by the Lord who was appointed by God to speak his words directly to the people. He would say, "Thus says the Lord," and everything that followed was the word of God directly to the people. To disobey these words of the prophet was to disobey God himself. But the prophet proved himself as a prophet by making predictions that came true.

D. The Yearning of Moses, the Prediction of Joel

Numbers 11:29 I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Joel 2:28-29 '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. ²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

E. The Day of Pentecost and the Gift of Prophecy

1. Acts 2: Joel's prophecy comes true
2. The Holy Spirit descends in fire on the assembled church, and people began to speak in languages as the Spirit enabled them
3. Peter's Pentecost Sermon cites Joel, emphasizes prophecy

Acts 2:15-21 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ "In the last days, God says, 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.

F. The Cessationists Understanding of the New Testament Prophets

1. Like the Old Testament era, these were sources of direct revelation from God; their words were eventually written down and became the New Testament
2. When the last New Testament book (the Book of Revelation) was completed, all new and direct revelations from God CEASED

Revelation 22:18-19 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹ And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

3. The Apostles and Prophets were the foundation of the church

Ephesians 2:20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

John Stott: "Now the simplest knowledge of architectural construction is enough to tell us that once the foundation of a building is laid and the superstructure is being built, the foundation cannot be laid again. So in the primary sense of 'prophets,' as vehicles of direct and fresh revelation, we must say that this *charisma* (spiritual gift) is no longer given. There is no longer anyone in the church who may dare to say, 'The word of the Lord came to me...' or 'Thus says the Lord.'" [Baptism and Fullness, 101]

4. So this is KEY to the cessationist argument... if the New Testament prophets are the same as the Old Testament prophets as bringers of direct revelation from God, then once the Scripture is complete, that time is over

G. BUT... Are There Different Types of Prophets in the New Testament Church?

1. Is it possible that there were prophets who spoke with an authority LESS THAN that of scripture... but who still were using the gift of prophecy?
2. This is the charismatic understanding of the gift of prophecy
3. Wayne Grudem cites a number of examples in which New Testament prophets speak with an authority LESS THAN that of scripture
 - a. Acts 21:4, some disciples urged Paul "through the Spirit" (i.e. by the gift of prophecy) not to go to Jerusalem; but Paul disobeyed it and went to Jerusalem anyway. If NT prophets spoke with authority equal to that of Scripture, Paul would never have disobeyed it
 - b. In 1 Thessalonians 5 and 1 Corinthians 14, Paul commands the weighing of prophecies spoken by prophets... this implies not

all their utterances were perfect... but it doesn't mean that they were false prophets

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 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.

1 Corinthians 14:29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

As Wayne Grudem puts it, "We cannot imagine that an Old Testament prophet like Isaiah would say 'Listen to what I say and weigh what is said – sort out the good from the bad, what you should accept from what you should not accept.'"

c. There is also the example of prophecy about Timothy

1 Timothy 1:18 Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight

d. Also, not all prophets were authoritative leaders (like apostles)

Acts 21:9 [Philip] had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

e. Sometimes prophecies gave guidance for the work of missions

Acts 13:1-4 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

So prophecy did not always function as predictions about the future... but a form of direct communication from God about what to do

- f. Prophets speak a clear word that convicts the hearts of unbelievers

1 Corinthians 14:24-25 if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, ²⁵ and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

4. How Wayne Grudem understands the authority of prophecy today
 - a. Prophecies in churches today should be considered merely human words, not equal to scripture in authority
 - b. Prophecy can be impure... a message from God mixed up together with our own thoughts and ideas
 - c. Therefore, no modern-day prophet should ever say "Thus says the Lord," but more something like "It seems to me the Lord is saying thus and such to us..."
5. So... if prophecy does NOT actually contain the word of the Lord for us, WHAT IS IT??
 - a. Paul calls an idea that pops into the mind of a prophet a "revelation" (1 Cor. 14:30-31)
 - b. An idea that suddenly comes into the mind of a prophet... that person then puts into his own words what he has understood from God
6. How is prophecy different than preaching or teaching?
 - a. The Puritans used the word "prophesying" to refer to preaching (William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*)
 - b. Grudem says teaching (and preaching) are never based on direct revelations from God but come as a result of exegesis, interpretation, explanation and application of existing SCRIPTURE
 - c. Teaching is therefore MORE authoritative than teaching in the New Testament, because it is based on the written word of God

and not a subjective sense of revelation that pops in the prophet's mind

H. My Analysis

1. I think Grudem brings up some interesting points... but I find it very difficult to understand how prophecy can function in the 21st century church
2. How can we know that someone is a prophet if they don't predict the future and have it come true? **[TGC Panel discussion!!!]**
3. This is the time-bound proof of a prophet... and I don't know why we would relax it now
4. Clear example: Agabus and the famine

Acts 11:27-30 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹ The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

5. In charismatic churches, some people claiming to be prophets may get up and say the Lord is telling all the husbands to love their wives like Christ loves the church... there is NO WAY to verify if that is truly coming from the Lord or not, if the prophet has never been tested and tried

For example, I was speaking with a man who was in a Sovereign Grace church, and they just have an OPEN MIKE, and people almost always only share scripture

6. There is also a clear DANGER of prophets telling people what to do with their lives, and giving subjective guidance that can never be proven
7. YET... I still think 1 Corinthians 13 implies that tongues and prophecies will be functioning until the Lord returns

8. The Story of Olaf Tryggvason, the King of Norway

Olaf Tryggvason (b. 963-d. 1000) "Posthumous child, great-grandson of Harald Fairhair, ruler of Norway; Led an adventurous and colorful life;

Early captured by the Vikings and sold as a slave, he was rescued by an uncle, adopted the life of a Viking, raided England,

Olaf was anchored in the Isles of Scilly off the west coast of England

Heard that there lived a Christian hermit who prophesied future events which came true.

Olaf sent one of his tall handsome men to pose as himself to the soothsayer/hermit

Soothsayer said, "You are not the king, and I give you the advice to be faithful to your king."

Olaf then sought him out as asked if he, Olaf, would attain a kingdom. The hermit replied with a holy prophecy. "You will become a famous king and work famous deeds. You will bring man men to the true faith and baptism, and in so doing benefit both yourself and may other. And lest you doubt my answer, let this be a token: when you come to your ships you shall encounter a traitor band, and you will yourself receive a mortal wound and be borne on your shield to the ship. But you will recover from this wound within seven days and be baptized soon thereafter."

When Olaf returned to his ships the events occurred as the hermit had foretold. Olaf then believed he was a prophet. Olaf again visited the hermit and asked whence he had the wisdom that he could foretell the future. The hermit said that it was the god of Christian men himself who let him know all he was anxious to know. He told Olaf of many miracles of God, and persuaded Olaf to be baptized: and so Olaf and all his men were baptized there.

II. The Gifts of Healings

A. Paul Speaks of This Gift in the Plural

1 Corinthians 12:8-9 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit

Though all of the English translation make “gifts” plural, they all make “healing” singular... but actually both are plural: “gifts of healings”

B. This Implies a Wide Array of Healing Ministries

1. Different levels, different types

C. The Overpowering Problem of Disease and Injury Worldwide

1. Of all the spiritual gifts, it seems like this is the one we could desire the most
2. The staggering sorrow brought on the human race by all kinds of disease and injury is the greatest suffering the descendants of Adam face in this world
3. There is no part of the body immune to the ravages of disease and injury, and the agonies of pain brought on every single day worldwide is incalculable
4. Who of us has not stood in a hospital room or an ICU or witnessed a serious car accident and not wished we could lay hands on someone and instantly heal them
5. One government site estimates that \$3.5 trillion is spent on health care annually in the US... approximately \$10,700 per person.

D. The Healing Ministry of Jesus Christ

1. Jesus Christ was the greatest healer in history
2. He healed whole populations that swarmed out to see him when they heard what he could do

Matthew 4:24-25 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. ²⁵ Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him

3. There was no case too severe, no illness he could not cure

Mark 7:37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

4. He effectively banished sickness from Palestine during his three-year ministry

5. None of his apostles had such a widespread healing ministry as Jesus

6. As a result of his healings, the crowds got so huge that no one could get near him... some men bringing a paralyzed man on a pallet had to dig a hole through the roof and lower the man down with ropes

7. BUT these healings did not guarantee faith on the part of those healed or those who heard about the healings;

8. As a matter of fact, the Jewish authorities, after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, were determined to kill both Jesus AND Lazarus!

E. Jesus Did Not Come to Eliminate Disease, Suffering and Death in His FIRST COMING

1. Sickness and injury is part of the curse of death in Adam

2. Jesus' healings point to a day when all that will end... the New Heavens and New Earth, where there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain

3. BUT all the people Jesus healed eventually died of something

F. Death is the "final enemy" that Jesus will conquer at his second coming

G. The Apostles did SOME of those types of healings as a part of their ministry... but it was not a river of healings like in Jesus' day

H. Do Miraculous Healings Happen Today?

1. Last time, I mentioned the fakers and frauds and charlatans like Kathryn Kuhlman and Benny Hinn, who have never healed ORGANIC ILLNESSES...

2. However, I do believe that individual people have been healed miraculously in direct answer to the prayers of God's people...

James 5:14-15 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.

3. And though I have not heard of a legitimate example of a faith healer on the order of Jesus or the Apostles, yet it is not impossible that a form of the gift of healing is still operative today...a brother or sister in Christ who has a heart for sick people and goes and prays for them and over the years many of those prayers are answered with amazing healings

4. I JUST DON'T KNOW EITHER WAY... so I can't say that this gift of healing has most certainly stopped

III. Applications

A. Come to Christ!

B. Discover, Develop, Deploy!