

Good evening and welcome to the third in our series looking at the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Before Christmas we looked at what the Gifts of the Spirit are all about; and how to discover them in our lives.

Tonight we come to chapter 14, and to two fairly controversial gifts: tongues and prophecy.

So far we have seen that the Gifts of the Spirit are how we can do ministry like Jesus

In *John 14* Jesus said to his disciples that they would be able to do ministry like him, and better than him!¹

That's what he said in John 14v12.

Jesus said "you will be able to do ministry that is *even greater* than mine.

Now that's hard to believe – but this is why he said it:

Firstly, the power to do effective ministry,
the power to change people's lives forever,
the power to show God's love – doesn't come from us –
it comes from God living in us – his Holy Spirit.

Jesus' power to do ministry, to speak truth, to introduce people into a **living** relationship with his Father came (not from his own abilities (he tells us this in John 14v10) but from God living in him; God doing his work through him).

So Jesus didn't minister in his own power,
but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And **if that is true for Jesus** – then it's certainly true for us!

Our ability to do ministry *that is effective*, to help people find and know God, comes from God living in us, –
not from our own abilities, but from the Holy Spirit within us!

That's the first reason.

The second reason – is simply maths.

Jesus was just one man – so if he could reach 100 people every day for a 100 years he would only save some 3 ½ million people in his life.

*You and me – if we reached just only 1 person every year – and they **also** reached just 1 person every year, and so and so on, **together** we would reach 9 BILLION people in just 34 years.*

That sounds unlikely – but here is the maths...

If Jesus reached 100 people every day for 100 years he would save just over 3½ million people.

If we could reach with the love of God just 1 person every year,
and they reached 1 person every year, and so on –
together we'd reach 9 billion people with God's love in 34 years.

That's why Jesus said we'd do even greater things than him

We have the same power in us, as him; and

There are more of us than him!

The Holy Spirit is the power of God living in us, to do ministry like Jesus, to point people to God like Jesus, to change people's lives, like Jesus.

And the way we do this is by exercising the Spiritual Gift that God has given us

every one of us has at least one Spiritual Gift

If you're a Christian here tonight,
God has given you a gift and called you to use it in his church –
Your ministry, finding your place in church, is crucial to the gospel.

Now if every Christian has a Spiritual Gift – the question is
what is the difference between a spiritual gift and a natural talent?

Well,
when we're born we receive natural talents, everyone has them, and they need to be discovered and trained.
when we're born again, when we become a Christian, God gives us a spiritual gift, only God's people have
them, and they also need to be discovered and trained.

a natural talent can be effective in our own strength (we can exercise it **without** God) –
a spiritual gift is only effective in partnership with God (only **with God** does it have spiritual impact).

Now this is where it gets confusing...
just because all Christians can “have a go” at all the gifts using their **natural** abilities –
that doesn't mean that, **that** is our “SPIRIT given” spiritual gift,

Let me repeat that, we can all do a pretty good job at many of the giftings using our own natural abilities
(for God) - without it being a spiritual gift,

*So I can have a stab at the gift of cooking hospitality using my own **natural** abilities
I could even do a half decent job at it (as luck would have it) –
and people may even offer words of encouragement and appreciation – (if I ask often enough and they
survive long enough to get the words out)
but it isn't my gift!
am I energised by it? No
do I have the style of Nigella Lawson or the expertise of Jamie Oliver? – No
can I swear like Gordon Ramsey (well maybe) but that's not the point*

Most of us can probably do a half-decent job at many of the gifts (using our own (God given) natural
abilities) but that doesn't mean to say that it is our ‘Spirit given’ gift

Most people can teach the ‘2 times table’ to an adult – but that doesn't mean to say they're gifted teachers
A lot of people can preach a decent enough sermon (using their own natural communication skills) – but
that doesn't mean to say that they're gifted in it.

Many people can do administration, can give help, can show mercy, can speak wisely, can display faith, can
even speak in different languages (using their own God given natural abilities) but that doesn't mean to say
that they are Spirit gifted in it.

Do you see?

God has given every Christian a spiritual gift
its different to a natural talent because it is God's way for us to exercise anointed, **effective**, ministry, just
like Jesus.

It is God's way to build others up, to produce fruit, for people to love God through it.

So do you know where your gifts lie?
And if not, are you willing to ask God to show you?
Because I want to offer you that opportunity tonight.

And so we come to Chapter 14
where Paul talks about two particular gifts –
the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy.
He spends a whole chapter on these 2 gifts because, the reality is, they can cause more mischief and hurt in
a church, through ignorance and over-enthusiasm, than any other gift... and I've seen it.

So this is what I want to do
first of all I want to define what tongues and prophecy are all about.
secondly I want to walk through the main themes of the passage; and
then I want to give us all an opportunity to respond.

I want to define a few things, talk about the passage, and give time for us to respond.

1. So let's define a few things –

1.1 Let's start with this strange gift called Tongues

What are tongues all about?

Well the Greek word we translate as “tongues,” actually means “language”.

So tongues means language

Now there are all sort of different languages in the world.

If we go to France people speak French and many know French

If we go to Poland they speak Polish and a few know Polish

If we go to Liverpool they speak Scouse and who knows what they are talking about!

And finally, if you go to, Heaven, there's a Heavenly language too (perhaps more than one) which I
presume angels and God communicate with.

And so tongues means languages –

And there are various earthly languages, as well as Heavenly ones.

and we **first** come across this gift

at Pentecost where it is used as a missionary gift

In Acts chapter 2 there is this huge festival thing going on in Jerusalem,

and Jews from all over the world (each with their own native tongue)

have gathered to party.

And God wants to speak to them – so he supernaturally empowers the disciples to stand up and to preach,
and to preach in the Native tongues of those who are in Jerusalem.

And at first the people assume the disciples are drunk speaking gobbledygook,

but then they realise they are speaking in **their** languages

and God moves so powerfully among them that 3,000 people give their lives to Jesus and get saved on that
day.

So firstly, tongues can be a human language given for the purpose of speaking to people about Jesus in a
way they can understand.

The **second** expression of the gift of tongues is that it's a prayer language,
It can be that we are at home praying and we'll be praying in English,

and we'll be wanting to just pour our heart out to God in thanks and praise
and somehow the English words we are using just aren't sufficient –
and so we'll slip into a Heavenly language,
unknown by us,
but which is simply an outpouring of love to God
in words that our head doesn't understand but which our heart knows is connecting with God.

People who use tongues this way: praise, intercede, talk with God, in ways which human words cannot express.

so tongues are an earthly language for speaking out loud;
they are a heavenly language for private prayer.

And **thirdly** they are used when God wants to speak to people about something specific.
If our Prime Minister wanted to speak to the head of China – he would speak in English but his words will be translated from into Mandarin through an interpreter.

In the church sometimes God wants to talk to his people about something specific –
so someone may stand up and speak in a tongue (either a human language or a heavenly one) and someone else 'gets it' and stands up translates for everyone to understand. That's the third way tongues are used.

So tongues are
a human language
a private prayer language.
an ability to give a message from God which needs interpretation
That's what tongues are all about.

1.2 OK, so what about prophecy.

Prophecy is simply proclaiming the word of God, to a specific people, about a specific thing.
That's its most general definition:
proclaiming God's truth to a specific people about a specific thing.

Most obviously: its preaching.
It's what I do for a living.
It's taking God's word (the Bible) proclaiming its truth
so that people understand what God is saying to them.
This is the broadest and most generous understanding of the concept of prophecy.
Its preaching God's word to a specific people about a specific thing.

But can also be more than that,
It can also be saying something specific about what God will do in the **future** to or for a specific group of people.
So: In the New Testament a guy called Agabus tells the church to get ready because a famine was going to hit the country – what they needed to do was to gather their food so that when the famine hit, they could use it to help people in need.
Prophecy is also about what God is going to do in the future.

So that's the definitions.

2. What does Paul say about them in Chapter 14?

and this is where it would help me if you'd turn to p1154 of your pew Bibles
Pauls says

[v1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.](#)

We should want Spiritual gifts

We should all want to discover what our Spiritual Gifts are
Because this is how we make a difference that lasts forever.
But we should especially desire the ones that help us understand what God is saying to us.

The one thing that keeps the church on course, that keeps everyone on mission, that keeps everything together, is when the Bible is taught accurately and applied to our lives so that we know who Jesus is and what he wants us to do with our lives.

So what God says is – love all the gifts and if you want to honour one, honour the ones that helps you understand what God wants of you.

v2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God.
Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.

If you have the ‘prayer gift of tongues’,
it’s between you and God, because we won’t know what you’re saying...

*If you pray out loud in a tongue, we’ll still love you,
but we’ll have no idea what you’re saying
It would be like me getting up and doing Klingon for 5 minutes.*

*For the first few moments you might think it’s a little cute
“nuqDaq 'oH puchpa' e' – which apparently means
“where is the bathroom” in Klingon
(I got that from www.everydayklingonphrases.com – I kid you not!)
But after a while, if I carry on, you’re beginning to think when will this idiot shut up?”*

So praying in public in tongues –
is at **best** pretty useless and at worst really self-indulgent.

v3 But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.
Its good to hear God’s word together
it encourages us, it strengthens us, it builds us up

v4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.
The main point of a spiritual gift is to build each other up.

If you have the gift of hospitality, you don’t make a Pavlova just for yourself! - the point is: it is for others.

*If you have the gift of teaching, you don’t say,
“Well, every Thursday night I’m going to stand in front of the mirror and parse Greek verbs to myself.
how sad would that be!”
The point of gifts is to build each other up –
which is why knowing your gift and exercising your ministry is so important*

v5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy.
He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.

Paul doesn’t say we shouldn’t speak in tongues?
As a church we are not against speaking in tongues?
But its better to get into God’s word together.

So preaching is above tongues.
*Which is why we a lot of time in the Bible and
we have yet to have a “tongue-athon” in aid of mission Rwanda!*

v6 Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?

v9 Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.

v11 If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me.

v13 For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret.

v16 for if you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who does not understand say "Amen", since he does not know what you are saying? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other is not edified.

When I first became a Christian my Dad took me to a Pentecostal Church in Richmond.

It was one of those experiences I'll never forget.

The worship was enthusiastic – and that was good

The preaching was for an hour –but actually that was good too

And then they had a time of open worship

And that's when it really kicked off.

There were people shouting, Praise banners flying, tambourines... tamborining and people falling over...

And everybody was speaking in tongues simultaneously, out loud and very loud.

Now I was 17 and I had never even heard of tongues - let alone experienced it.

It was scary!

They were obviously enjoying themselves

But I felt completely alienated.

I couldn't join in, I didn't understand, nothing was explained.

As I look back on it –

I think Paul would have said it was both childish and self-centred.

For it didn't care for those who weren't "in".

let me tell you Church is a place where people should be built up

not made to feel aliens and strangers

Church is a place where people should feel cared for

where should feel loved.

I felt none of those things...

v23 So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

Absolutely!

If I said right now "Lets have a tongues-athon, a tongues-fest, a tongues-amania!"

If I said "1,2,3 Go!" and everyone started speaking out in a strange language...

And you happened to have chosen this night to bring your non-Christian friend!

And we're all "yabadaba Jesus loves You woo-hoo-hoo!"

what are they going to think!

They're going to say "we're nuts."

Its going to be like happy hour at a Sloviaan bar

Everybody's crazy and they don't speak English!

You'd say

Oh boy I'm sorry, I promise you its not usually like this,

*It's my fault.
I'll pay for your therapist!
It doesn't work!*

v24 But if an unbeliever comes in while everybody is prophesying,
he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all,
and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare.
So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

The reality is that we love a God speaks to us
he communicates with us
through his word, through revelation
and what he says is true

Jesus says: if you look around the world, you'll see that it is broken, people are broken, families are broken,
systems are broken and that injustice is everywhere –
and God says “you can do nothing about it”.
isn't that true?

Jesus says: is that if you look at your own life,
you know you have screwed up
you know you are not the person you could be or should be; and
to all intents and purposes you have lived your life your own way not God's way
and God says “you can be perfect even if you wanted to be”.
isn't **that** true?

Jesus says without God
you have no idea where you fit in the universe,
you have no idea what your everlasting purpose is,
what lasting meaning there is to your life
you have no solid hope in death
and God says “you can do nothing about it”.
isn't **that** true!?

Jesus says
if you look into your own experience of God – he is not a friend to you,
he is a stranger,
you don't really know him, and
in death when everything is stripped away you will be left utterly alone.
and “you can do nothing about it”.
and that's true too!

God says “you can do nothing about it – but I can – and I have”.
I have done something and
That something is Jesus
And I am speaking to you and you *can* respond....

If you want to bring healing into your brokenness
If you want to set the record straight
If you want to start again
If you want to find why God made you
If you want to find God as a friend
If you want to experience the Spirit of God in your life
If this rings true to you...

3. Then you can respond.

You can return to God and take him as Lord of your life

(the one who calls the shots, the one who directs your paths, the one you will follow, the one who will never leave you, the one for whom you were made)

You can respond!

You can be sure that there is forgiveness because of Jesus (because he said as they crucified him “Father forgive”)

You can be sure that there is hope in death because of Jesus (because he has come back from death to show you life)

You can be that there is a life that is worth living because of Jesus (because that is why you were made)

You can be sure by making your faith personal

By saying to God I did reject you but now “you are King”... and we will pray for you

If you want to respond like that then please come to the front... and we will pray for you... and your life can change...

If you want to respond to God’s desire that you **find your gift** and enter into ministry in the church to build others up.. then please come to the front and we will pray for you... and your life can change...

If you want a particular gift that you feel you want to serve God with and you think God is calling you to step out with (be it administration, mercy, giving, helping others, hospitality, encouragement, leadership, tongues, interpretation, preaching... then come and ask and we will pray for you... It is God who gives gifts but he asks us to ask...

If you want to respond by saying to God –

It’s the start of the year and I realise that mostly I have been trying to serve you in my own strength and not in your Spirit’s power

I have been keeping you out of this area of my life and this year I want you to take ALL of my life to serve you

(and what Christian DOESN’T want that)

then please come to the front... and we will pray for you

We stand at the threshold of a new year.

If you want this year to be different to last year with God’s Spirit in you come and ask...

I’m going to ask the band to come and play and sing quietly,

If you want to come and be prayed for please come ...

and that at the end I will wrap it up with a suggestion of what you might do next...