

Where do You Fit?  
The Prophetic Gift  
APEST – Part II  
August 6, 2017

Call to Worship:

*<sup>11</sup> So Christ himself gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 2:1 – 3:11

Last week we began this new series looking at the fivefold ministry calling of Jesus found in Ephesians 4:11. I said that the in Ephesians 4:11 is believed by many today to be different than the listings of the spiritual gifts found in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and 1 Peter 4. That this in Ephesians 4:11, otherwise known as APEST, represents Jesus' fivefold ministry calling that He gives to every single one of His followers through the third person of the trinity – the Holy Spirit.

Every mature Christian should be able to answer two questions:

1. What is the primary APEST calling that Jesus has gifted you with?
2. How are you using that calling to build up the body of Christ or expand the Kingdom of God here on earth?

The answer to question #1 doesn't come very easily. It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of discernment and prayer. It takes time studying the attributes of each of the five gifts. One needs to take some of the surveys that are out there – probably more than one (two free ones are at the end of outline once again this morning), and we need to ask those who know us best.

Last week we started with what is probably the least brought out gift in the church, the Apostolic Gift. But every church needs at least some apostles. Apostles are the ones that challenge the church, to go out, to reach out of our comfort zone, to take risks, to expand the kingdom of God in whatever setting we find ourselves in. Without the apostolic gift present in a church – the church will close in on itself.

The gift we are looking at today is the second least brought out gift in the church today – the Prophetic Gift. Simply put, a prophet is one who speaks on God's behalf. A prophet is one who is close both to the Word of God and the Heart of God. In the definition on your outline the word and is underlined because a prophet needs to be both, close both to the Word of God and the heart of God!

Prophets of God have not fared too well throughout human history. Almost the entire Old Testament was written by prophets, or if not written by them, communicated by the prophets to

those who wrote many of the books of the Old Testament Scriptures. Many of the major prophets we know, like – Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. The minor prophets we are less familiar with. It is believed by many that even the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy were written by a prophet, that being Moses.

If you have been following along with the Bible reading schedule for the year and/or following in the Sunday school curriculum which some of the adult SS classes follow you have been reading from the Old Testament prophets.

Just like the apostles that we looked at last week, many have taught over the course of the 2,000 year history of the church that prophets don't exist today. But again that is not the case. Prophets are talked about in the New Testament almost as much as in the Old Testament. If no prophets exist in New Testament times, why did Paul say, "Jesus gave some to be prophets – just as Jesus gave some to be apostles, evangelists, shepherds and teachers."

Throughout human history prophets have often been misunderstood. Prophets have been known to be both "foretelling" and "forthtelling." By foretelling I mean telling about events that will happen in the future. Those are what prophets are best remembered for. But, one thing that prophets were never very good at is foretelling specific dates and times. Hence, most of the Jewish people missed their promised Messiah, Jesus, when He came. Jesus himself said "it is not for us to know the times and dates that God the Father has established."

But prophets primary calling is not foretelling, but "forthtelling" or "truthtelling." They are called to speak into the gap between the way things are and the way God wants things to be. Throughout history prophets have been mostly sent by God to speak to His people. Ezekiel was called by God to speak to the Israelites. He was first sent by God to speak a message of God's uncompromising judgment upon God's people, the Israelites, because of their unfaithfulness. And then later, a message of restoration upon God's people, the Israelites, because of God's faithfulness.

Just like the other four primary gifts, Jesus himself was the ultimate prophet. We find that in the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John, right at the very beginning:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

John 1:1-2, 14 (NIV)

It says towards the beginning of Luke's gospel:

<sup>14</sup> *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (after being tempted by Satan in the wilderness and as he was to begin his prophetic ministry), and news about him spread through the whole countryside.* <sup>15</sup> *He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.* <sup>16</sup> *He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read,* <sup>17</sup> *and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

<sup>18</sup> *“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,<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

<sup>20</sup> *Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down.*

*The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. Luke 4:14-20 (NIV)*

There were the O.T. prophets, then the ultimate prophet Jesus, and now N.T. prophets. There are differences between O.T. prophets and N.T. prophets. Most often, God spoke directly to the Old Testament prophets and He spoke only to a select few. God speaks to New Testament prophets today mostly through His written word found in the Scriptures and His Living Word, Jesus Christ:

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, who he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*  
Hebrews 1:1-2

New Testament prophets need to be into the Word, or better yet, the Word needs to be into them, and they need to be connected to Jesus, the word become flesh.

Prophets are driven by a passion for God and His will. They often have to preach a message of repentance to God’s people – “return to God and return to His ways!” Because of that prophets are not always well liked. Jesus himself said, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown” (Luke 4:24).

Both Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets are the mouthpiece for God. They listen well and then they speak words from God to other people. Mature prophets learn how to equip others to hear God’s voice and obey His leading.

Anyone who speaks from the pulpit in a church on a regular basis should have the prophetic calling as either his or her primary gift or at least one of their primary gifts, because that is what the pulpit was designed for.

Many Christians blessed with artistic gifts also have a prophetic calling and they use their gift of writing music or singing music, painting, or another form of art to communicate God’s message to His people.

Whereas in the Old Testament, God chose only a select few to be his prophets, today many Christians have the prophetic giftedness and all Christians have the ability to build on their prophetic giftedness, and the responsibility to ensure that those things a prophet is claiming, are true and from God.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians, 5:19-22, “Do not put out the Holy Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. But test everything carefully. Hold on to what is good (meaning that which is from God). Avoid every kind of evil (that which is not from God).” Today, every Christian has access to God’s Word and the Holy Spirit to test the message of any prophet.

## **Five characteristics or benefits of Prophets:**

### **1. NEW TESTAMENT PROPHETS ARE GOD'S PRIMARY HUMAN MESSENGERS TODAY**

Yes, every Christian today has access to hear God directly, through His Word and the Holy Spirit, but we still need prophets today? Why? Because just like God's people of O.T. times, the Israelites, we continually struggle with unfaithfulness and are often blind and dull of hearing. It says in 1 Corinthians 14:3 that "everyone who prophecies speaks to men and women for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort."

Though we all have access today to the authoritative Scriptures, otherwise known as the Bible, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, we also need to hear God's message to us through others to help us through this constantly changing and hostile world.

### **2. THE PROPHET IS A TRUTH TELLER**

As I previously mentioned, prophets are "truth-tellers." Most prophets don't beat around the bush or sugar coat the message. Prophets confront us with God's Word and how far we often are from God and His Word. They are constantly challenging us to "repent," to change, to turn-back.

### **3. MOST PROPHETS ARE GUARDIANS OF JUSTICE**

Because justice and righteousness are deep concerns rooted in the heart of God, they are highly valued by the prophets. Prophets are so in touch with the heart of God that they weep with God at the injustice found in the world and are compelled to call others to act upon it.

Prophets are concerned for the poor, the oppressed, those discriminated by race, age, sex and other things. They are concerned for immigrants, the unborn, those suffering throughout the world, unnecessary violence, and on and on and on.

But when it comes to peace and justice issues for Christians, the horse needs to come before the cart. The cart represents all those peace and justice issues, the horse is the Word of God – both the written Word found in the Bible and the living Word Jesus Christ. It seems that for many in the Mennonite Church over the past 30-50 years, it is the cart that's leading. Often it even seems like the cart is self-propelled and there is no longer any need for the horse. Our concern for peace and justice issues, whatever they may be, must originate in our faith in Jesus and the authority of God's Word.

### **4. PROPHETS ARE WELL AWARE OF THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE THAT TAKES PLACE IN THIS WORLD –**

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:10-13 (NIV)*

Because dealing with spiritual revelation and conflict is exhausting work, the vast majority of prophets are introverts who value times of solitude. For those who preach from the pulpit on a regular basis, even if they were an extrovert when they started preaching, by the time they get to the end of their careers, most of them are introverts. That's just one of the downsides of the profession.

Because of that, a strong prayer life is essential to the life and well being of a prophet. Prophets need time alone with God to receive the words from God and to strengthen their souls. If Jesus himself needed all that alone time with God, how much more so for human prophets?

## 5. PROPHETS DO SEE WHAT IS TO COME

While it might not be their primary trait, and very rarely does it involve knowing exact dates and times, if they are connected to God and His Word, they do know what is to come. Actually it's all spelled out for us in the Bible, a lot clearer than we would like to admit or believe. Where most, self-proclaimed New Testament prophets get themselves in trouble, is when they try and predict exact times and specific events. When those don't happen, especially over and over again, one should rightfully question whether that person really is a prophet or not.

Just like the other four giftings of Jesus' five-fold ministry from Ephesians 4:11, prophets have a shadow side as well.

### **Drawbacks or shadow side of Prophets:**

- Some of them tend to be a little different (John the Baptist came wearing camel's hair and eating locusts and honey, Jeremiah is said to have been manic-depressive, and Ezekiel mildly insane.
- The prophet is probably the loneliest ministry
- Prophecy is one of the most polarizing of the APEST gifts.
- Less-than-mature prophets have a difficult time recognizing the strengths and the validity of others giftedness.
- Prophets tend to see everything in terms of black and white.
- A prophet's zeal for the truth can also lead to a lack of patience with people.
- Prophets can get discouraged quite easily and even suffer from depression due to all the evil in the world. They can get very jaded and present only the one side of God which then makes the truth not the whole truth, the word of God not only becomes a two-edged sword but a deadly weapon, and the Gospel no longer the Good News.

Much of the credit for my message this morning needs to be given to Neil Cole and his book, *Primal Fire: Reigniting the Church with the Five Gifts of Jesus*. He offers us a great summary of the shadow side of prophets:

"Seeing God as always angry and disappointed is neither healthy nor true. The Bridegroom also has many words of joy and intimacy to speak into His bride's ear. As prophets mature, they come to realize that God is multifaceted and has many words of hope and grace as He does of correction. When prophets grow so weary of evil that they actually prefer condemnation over redemption, they have fallen prey to the Jonah syndrome. They stop wanting to see change and

instead desire to witness the punitive wrath of an angry God on an unrepentant people. Unfortunately this syndrome continues to plague prophetic people today. But love is our greatest command, and holiness is impossible without it.”

While that passage from Luke 4, Jesus’ own words when He became His prophetic ministry here on earth, might just be a prophet’s Scriptural mantra, a healthy and mature prophet knows that he or she has to refer back to 1 Corinthians 13:1-2 often:

*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

That is why prophets need to be close to both the Word of God and the Heart of God.