

Midweek Study 6

Hearing God's voice.

Acts 2:22-24 says

And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.

This is not generally how we want God to speak to us. Particularly when we consider that Paul himself wrote that prophesy was for exhortation, edification, and encouragement. Hmm.

Acts 21:4 says

And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.

Also, vv10-12 talk about a personal prophecy that has him bound and turned over to the Gentiles.

Paul already knew that he would go to Jerusalem, and that he would face serious problems when he got there. Why then was he being implored not to go? Was this to do with the believers' interpretation of the word, out of their love for Paul? And Agabus – everything he said actually ended up happening, but not in the way that he said it would.

Here we have the issue of how to receive prophetic words.

Not only that...but what about Paul hearing from God earlier in Acts. In Acts 16 it reads *⁶Next Paul and Silas travelled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. ⁷Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there. ⁸So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas.*

It's this picture of Paul and Silas going "let's go here" and God saying – nope, that wasn't me. "OK, let's go here"; nope, still not me.

⁹That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" ¹⁰So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there.

Oh, right! What gave that away?

So, with all this going on, I thought I would bring a friend in on this one. This is Kathy Tainsh, a wonderful lady in the Tamworth congregation, who really has done a lot of work on how to hear God's voice, and communicate that to others.

1. So Kath, welcome, tell us a bit about yourself.

2. Now Kath, tell us a bit about Paul in Acts. What is going on here? Why was he so unable to pick up what God was putting down initially? Why did he need a prophetic dream?

- So back in Acts 9 we read about Paul's encounter with Jesus for the first time (except he was called Saul back then). And in Acts 26 Paul gives us a bit more details about his encounter with Jesus in which he gets a specific commission to go and reach the gentile people with the good news of the gospel. So Paul has this revelation of his mission, and so you see in Acts 16 that he and Silas are continuing to act on that revelation – they are going from place to place as they think best until God actually starts to stop them from going into certain places. So I don't think Paul is missing it, or not hearing clearly, but is being obedient to the revelation he had, and it's actually God who is holding back some information at this point. He's starting to shift the direction Paul is going and getting Paul's attention. I imagine Paul is going "wait – not here? What's happening God? Where are you leading me?" And so by the time Paul has this dream he is ready to pay attention to it. It's very relational. And I think something we can all relate to, honestly. We keep going with the previous revelation we have of the direction we're going until God starts to leave little clues that the season is changing so we start paying attention and asking questions until the time is right for him to reveal the next step of the plan. It keeps us connected to and resting in God's wisdom.
- So why did he need a prophetic dream? I don't know, really. But I know that God loves to speak to us in our dreams, and perhaps there was an extra clarity that Paul received by him speaking to him this way. I know for myself the clearer that God speaks it's because I've needed that extra level of certainty for when things seem to be going to opposite direction.

3. Thinking about the end of Acts, and Paul resolutely wanting to go to Jerusalem, and later Rome, and the believers not wanting him to go, can you talk to us a little about prophetic guidance, specifically:

- The revelation itself
- The interpretation of the revelation
- The application of the interpretation
- This is such an interesting story with Agabus and various others giving Paul warnings about Jerusalem. I just want to take a detour for a moment and mention that in 1 Corinthians, especially around chapters 12 and 14 we see Paul giving the Corinthians some really clear instructions about prophecy – what its purpose is, what are the guidelines for a healthy culture of moving in

spiritual gifts, etc. The books of Acts is a little different in that it's a narrative, and it's showing people in their every day life using the gifts.

- It can be helpful to think of a prophetic word as having 3 different parts – revelation, interpretation, and application. So the revelation part is the initial piece of information. In Agabus case, he might have had a picture in his imagination of a rope tying hands and feet. Then we get to start asking God questions – what does this mean, and we wait for His interpretation and His perspective of that initial revelation. This is a really important step because God is the creator – he has a much higher perspective of what is happening in our lives, and has a creative solution to every problem. And if we just stick with that piece of information, or even that initial discernment of what is happening in the demonic realm or in our soul, then we can get stuck in those places and miss the higher revelation and empowerment that God is wanting to give to us. And that's where we get the application part of the word – what God is doing and enabling here in our lives.
 - There's some other really interesting things we can note in this story with Agabus, because the people love Paul and don't want harm to come to him, but have missed the higher calling that Paul has on his life, and he brings this correction to them – guys, don't break my heart by crying here – there is a greater call on my life to live and die for the gospel, and to spread it as far and wide as I can in the time given to me. In other words, you guys actually stopped short of the full revelation in this moment. You gave me a warning, but then you're emotions stopped you shy of seeing the big picture.
 - This might also be a good moment to point out one of our other guidelines for operating in the gift of prophecy, and that is to actually avoid the areas of births, deaths and marriages, because they are highly emotional areas. And this story with Agabus actually highlights this. It takes a lot of maturity in the prophetic to operate in these areas.
 - Another interesting note is that Paul weighed the word he received. He took it and compared it with the previous revelations he had received. We can also do this, and we have the written word of God as a yard stick for any revelations we receive. So Paul stopped and weighed the word, and gave feedback.
4. How do we keep our own interpretation OUT of the revelation?
- I think the best way to keep our own interpretation out is by spending time with God learning more about his nature. Soaking in his word. Because the better we understand God's heart for us, the less likely we are to give whacky words. Also practicing prophecy helps, and we like to use certain techniques while people are learning to prophecy like closing your eyes so you're not getting any information from the other person, or practicing prophecies where you don't know which person you are prophesying over. But this is also

why it's important to weigh any word you are given, because we also have personal biases and sometimes they come through in prophecies.

5. Can you talk to us about the partial nature of prophecy?
 - 1 Corinthians 13: 9 says “We know in part and we prophesy in part”, so whatever revelation we get is only going to be a part of the whole picture. The prophecy is an *invitation* to walk closely with God and understand more about Him and about Us. It's interesting prophesying as a team, because each person can get a very similar revelation or theme, but it can be brought in a slightly different way with a slightly different flavour.
6. How about the progressive nature of prophecy?
 - The story of Paul and Silas going from place to place was a great example of this. God pretty much never gives us the full picture, because he loves walking with us, he loves the relational journey, and he also loves to build our faith. God loves faith.
7. Is prophecy conditional (e.g. it is cooperative in nature)?
 - Yes. Unless it's not. There is often a conditional aspect to prophecy. Like I said earlier, prophecy is an invitation into something more. “As you spend more time in my word I'm going to be bringing you a new level of revelation”. Well if you never open your bible you're not going to be receiving that revelation, are you? And this is the tricky thing about prophesying accurately with dates. There are parts that are dependent on how we choose to engage with the prophecy. Having said that, I know of a person that totally rejected a prophetic word they were given – burnt it, even, but 2 years later that person was walking out what was prophesied.
8. How should we treat prophesy?
 - I believe that we can actually fast track some of the words in our prophecies if we choose to actively engage with them. If we write them out and spend time dwelling on them each day as part of our devotional time, then it allows God that space to renew our thinking to line up with the way that he sees us. I believe we should honour it as God's voice and use it as a tool to spend time with God and get to know him better, have conversations with him.
 - And part of how we treat prophecy is also being aware that we need to weigh words that we are given. If a prophecy makes you feel condemned then I highly recommend you flush it, throw it away. It's great to share it with a mentor or someone you look up to spiritually and see what things they notice in the word.
9. How do we judge the leading of God in our own lives?
 - The word of God is really important for understanding God's leading, and his nature. There's often things in our lives that are not clear, but God allows us to test out his leading, and isn't offended by our questions. God is really good at leading, so it's really more about trusting him to show us the way than

focusing on our own ability to follow. It's more fun that way too. God is totally confident in who he is towards you.