



Tongues and Prophecy

Acts 19:1-6

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**This original sermon was not written by A.I.*

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, which happened way back in Acts 2. Fifty days after Jesus was resurrected, the Holy Spirit came upon the gathered believers with a mighty rushing wind, and they all began speaking in other tongues—in languages not known to the speakers. These other tongues were real languages. If you remember Acts 2, the Spirit-filled-Christians were speaking the various native tongues represented by the people residing in Jerusalem.

What exactly were they saying? Well, Acts 2:11 says, “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” They were declaring the wonders of God. I looked up this word “wonder” in my Greek lexicon, and what I found is that this word is

wonderful. You're going to love this word. In Greek, the word is “μεγαλειος” (megalios)—that in itself sounds impressive. Mega-leious carries a bunch of mega-wonderful meanings, such as magnificent, splendid, and grand but not just in any old way; it's in a way that impresses the mind or spirit—megaleios hits you right here deep in the chest. On Pentecost, they were speaking of the magnificence of God, of his splendid and grand nature in a way that impacts our own lives. What's the use of speaking about God's magnificence if it has nothing to do with our lives, right?

Other ways of using this word include “sublime beauty;” they were speaking about the beauty of God in a way that induces deep emotional feelings. Again, the emphasis is on God's sublime beauty making a deep impact on us where we are. Also, megaleios is about great and mighty

deeds—the great and mighty deeds that God is doing or will do on our behalf. This isn't about God's great and mighty deeds a thousand years ago or his mighty deeds on Jupiter. It's about God's great and mighty deeds right here right now, affecting our own lives where we stand on our patch of earth in the here and now.

A clear way to say it is, “They were declaring God's greatness toward us.” They were speaking in these other tongues about God's greatness toward us. And when you consider that the Holy Spirit was using all the languages represented in Jerusalem, this was about God's greatness being poured out upon the whole world. On the Day of Pentecost, the whole world was invited to experience the sublime beauty of God. People of every tribe and language are invited to experience God's life-changing greatness toward them.

For this message, we're going to dive a little bit into the gifts of the Holy Spirit, mainly tongues and a little bit about prophecy.

We're in the book of Acts in our series, "Church Afire!" Our passage is Acts 19:1-6.

I invite you to Acts 19:1-6.

19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples
2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in

Jesus.” 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 19:1–6.

The Word of God for the people of God.

As believers, we possess the Holy Spirit within us, and one of the Holy Spirit’s remarkable works is empowering us with spiritual gifts that serve the common good. These gifts bring glory and honor to God and strengthen his church. Let me ask you, have you ever thought about the gifts of the Spirit? Do you desire the gifts of the Spirit? Are you afraid of them? Maybe you have found your gift and have used it faithfully. Or maybe you’re wondering what your

spiritual gift is or you've recognized one but you don't know how to use it. Maybe you believe that spiritual gifts are only for pastors or leaders of the church. Maybe you've been taught that the spiritual gifts are no longer for today.

Well, I want to encourage you to open your heart— don't shy away, don't be afraid— and ask the Lord to confirm the spiritual gifts he has given to you. May he give you the boldness and courage to walk with him in it. If you believe in Christ, you have been given the Holy Spirit, and the day you open your heart to receive his gifts is the day you will be invited to walk in them. The gifts of the Spirit are for every believer today. I encourage you to seek the Lord for your spiritual gift if you haven't already. Gal. 5:16 tells us to walk in the Spirit, and part of walking in the Spirit is actively using the gifts the Spirit has given us.

The Gifts of the Spirit: Tongues and Prophecy

1 Cor. 12:8-10 gives us a short list of the gifts of the Spirit. Those gifts are words of Wisdom; words of knowledge; faith; gifts of healing; miraculous powers; prophecy; distinguishing between spirits; speaking in tongues; and the interpretation of tongues. The Apostle Paul encourages all of us, as the body of Christ, to do our part out of love for Christ and one another, using the gifts that the Spirit has given to each of us. In our passage, we see two of the spiritual gifts mentioned. These are two of the most poorly understood and controversial gifts: tongues and prophecy.

In Acts 19:1 Paul finds some disciples in Ephesus and asks them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” Now,

why might he ask this question? Scripture doesn't tell us but it is most likely that he noticed something missing in them. He likely noticed the lack of the Spirit's power in their lives. When a believer has the Holy Spirit, there is a noticeable difference.

These disciples answered, "We don't even know if there is a Holy Spirit!" In other words, they were saying the Spirit's presence was absent from among them—no noticeable empowering of the Spirit, no gifts of the Spirit, no fruit of the Spirit. It turns out that they were more of a disciple of John than a disciple of Jesus, having only been baptized with John's baptism. This is similar to Apollos in the last chapter, who had only known about John's baptism.

John's baptism was only meant to prepare hearts for belief in Jesus. It was a baptism of repentance meant to turn the Old Testament

believer toward the Messiah. It was not a Christian baptism, so to speak. As a result, they were missing the Holy Spirit in their lives. So, Paul, who undoubtedly saw their profession of faith in Christ, baptized them in the name of Jesus. He laid his hands on them, then they received the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues and prophesy.

The Gift of Tongues

Now, Presbyterians have traditionally shied away from speaking in tongues, and it depends on the church and the pastor as to whether the gift of tongues are encouraged or not. Very conservative Presbyterian churches will say that the gift of tongues ceased after the first century. Our denomination ECO does affirm all of the gifts of the Spirit including tongues as spiritual gifts available to us today. With that, you're most likely never going to hear

someone stand up and start speaking in tongues in the middle of worship like you might in a charismatic Pentecostal church. And the gift of tongues is not believed to be a necessary prerequisite for being filled with the Holy Spirit. Still, we do believe that the gift of tongues are for today.

What exactly is tongues? I talked about it a little bit earlier in my intro, but tongues is an unlearned language inspired by the Holy Spirit, which either edifies the listeners or the speaker's own self. In the Scripture we find that tongues can be an actual human language given by the Holy Spirit for a specific moment. In Acts 2, the purpose of tongues was to show the Jews that salvation had come to the Gentiles.

Tongues: An Earthly Language Unknown to the Speaker

In cases where the tongues are known human languages, there is always someone in the gathering who understands the language or who has been given an interpretation of it by the Holy Spirit. I have heard many missionary stories of someone praying in a tongue unknown to them, and someone else understanding the prayer because it was in a language they knew, or because they received the interpretation! I read the story of an English-speaking missionary who heard a non-English speaker praying in Old English. He could understand the prayer, but he later learned that the non-English speaker didn't know how to speak any English, let alone Old English. It was an enabling by the Holy Spirit. I have been in worship services myself where someone suddenly spoke in a tongue, then another person interpreted it, and my spirit bore witness with the interpretation as if I could understand the tongue, though I did not. The

interpretation aligned with what God was already speaking in my own heart before the tongue was even spoken!

Tongues: An Angelic or Heavenly Language

Besides tongues being an actual human language, it can also be what some might call an angelic language. In 1 Cor. 13:1 Paul says, “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels...” implying that the gift of tongues can be either an earthly language or a heavenly language. 1 Cor. 14:2 says, “For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.” Paul is clearly talking about a tongue that no one understands. Not a human language, but a language given from God—a heavenly language. What’s the

purpose though, if it is not understood by the speaker or anyone around?

Well, a couple verses later in that same chapter, Paul says, “Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves...” So, the heavenly tongue serves a different purpose than the earthly tongue. I’ll explain this a little further. In Rom. 8:26-27, Paul says, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.” This is the exact purpose of the angelic tongue. It is the Spirit’s enabling you to pray and intercede in line with the will of God when you have no idea what you should pray.

Have you ever been in a situation where you wanted to pray but could not find the words? There were simply no words that could express what you're feeling. Your mind could not string together a coherent sentence that would accurately reflect your heart's desperation. Even if you could, you're simply too exhausted to put the words into a prayer and pray them out. This is where the gift of tongues comes in powerfully. It's a gift that bypasses the hindrances and limitations of human mind and language. It is the deep inner groaning of your spirit communicating with God by the Holy Spirit through a language that heaven understands.

I have had too many situations like this in my life. Dark nights of the soul where I'm too overwhelmed to have any hope of grasping the right words to pray. In those moments, my gift of tongues takes the place of my mind's language. I have no clue what

I'm praying, but my spirit is openly communicating with God without inhibitions, and I can sense the Holy Spirit ministering to my heart, edifying my soul, and doing a work deep within. When I finish praying this way, I feel like I've completely prayed everything I needed to pray. My spirit spoke, but not in any language I knew. That is the gift of tongues that edifies your own spirit.

How do you receive the gift of tongues? Ask the Holy Spirit! It is a gift given by the Holy Spirit. If you do not want this gift, that is absolutely ok! You won't miss out on the Spirit's interceding work within you. You do not need the gift of tongues for the Holy Spirit to intercede for you. And you don't have to speak in tongues to be filled with the Holy Spirit! It is purely a gift among other gifts of the Spirit.

The Gift of Prophecy

Now, let's look at the gift of prophecy. The passage says that they spoke in tongues and prophesied. The gift of prophecy is about as controversial in the church as the gift of tongues. The Presbyterian church believes that authoritative prophecies or revelations are not given today. What this means is Scripture is closed. The Bible, as the authoritative Word of God, has been written in its entirety already. There are no more books to be added to the Bible. No more revelations that can be placed after the final book of Revelation. The Word of God as it stands today is the final Word of God.

That is incredibly important to believe because many cults and false teachers have come about claiming to hold a special revelation from God. They deceive many. Mormonism is one such cult, in which

Joseph Smith claims to have received from an angel a latter-day revelation called the book of Mormon. We don't accept any additions to the Bible that claim to be another special revelation alongside Scripture.

So, prophecy as we should understand it today is not about giving an authoritative revelation that stands alongside Scripture. True modern-day prophets are not going around writing new Scripture. So, what is modern day prophecy?

1 Cor. 14:3 tells us “the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort... the one who prophesies edifies the church.” Prophecy is for building up the church, but it's not just about speaking nice comforting words to somebody. Rev. 19:10 says, “the Spirit of

prophecy bears testimony to Jesus,” and that is the key to understanding true prophecy in the church age. True prophetic words will point people directly to Jesus. Prophecy will inspire the worship of Jesus. Prophecy will lead a person to follow Christ. Prophecy will open the heart to the work of Christ. The aim of all prophecy is to reveal Jesus Christ.

Three Meanings of the Word “Prophecy”

Let’s look at the meaning of this word prophecy in the Greek lexicon. The Greek word is προφητεύω (propheteow), and it generally carries three meanings. First, it means “to proclaim an inspired revelation.” This is the kind of prophecy that the Presbyterian church believes no longer exists. The Word of God is the final inspired revelation. However, prophecy can certainly unveil Christ to the previously closed heart.

Prophecy can open eyes and ears to the Word of God that were previously closed, and that leads to the second meaning.

Prophecy is telling about or revealing something that is hidden from view. This is the kind of prophecy that happens today. This is why we consider preaching the Word of God a prophetic gift. As the Word of God is taught and its meaning unveiled, prophecy happens. Eyes and ears are opened to Christ, and hearts receive the instruction from the Word. This is the heart of prophecy, bearing witness to Christ through his Word.

Third, prophecy is a foretelling of something that lies in the future. For modern-day prophecy, this a non-authoritative foretelling. God has already revealed his ultimate plan to us through his Word. God is not going to reveal anything about the future that he has not already revealed in Christ. I

have to be careful with this because generally the Presbyterian church believes prophecy is forth-telling rather than foretelling. In other words, prophecy proclaims God's truth, counsel, and will for the here and now rather than predicting the future.

However, God will use prophecy to speak about something specific to your life in a way that encourages you to give your life to Christ. A good portion of my ministry life was based on a prophetic word I received as a child about being a missionary and a preacher. Ultimately, that word prompted me to follow Christ with all my heart—it led me to turn my life over to Jesus. The prophetic word gave me strong assurance when God started opening doors for me to walk in that call.

Prophecy in Practice

There's a lot to say about this with not enough time, but every time God has led me in new, life-changing directions, I have had unsolicited prophetic words spoken over me about the future that line up with what was in my heart. So, I would call it confirmation from God rather than a foretelling, In this sense, the prophetic word wasn't about predicting the future, it was more about my journey with God and the call that would shape my next steps in life. Because of that, you will find that a prophetic word may not actually happen in the exact way it was spoken, though if it is from God, it will still be a truthful prophecy. Prophetic foretelling is not always a one-to-one mirror prediction of the future, but it is meant to lead you to take steps with Jesus.

I have also had so-called prophetic words about the future spoken over me that were

completely off base. This is why you are to test any prophecy that you hear— if it does not confirm what God is speaking to your heart; if it does not point you to Christ; if it does not have Jesus written all over it; if it does not edify or strengthen you; if it contradicts the Word of God or tries to take its place; then ignore it.

One last note. Prophecy is a gift of the Spirit, but I've seen that the Holy Spirit can speak prophetically through all of his people. If you sense the Lord leading you to speak words of encouragement or to teach his Word to someone, he very well might be working prophetically through you.

Prophecy does not have to come only by words. Playing an instrument or making a work of art in a way that glorifies God and inspires worship can also be prophetic.

Amen,

Let's pray.

Study Questions
Read Acts 19:1-6

Observation

- 1) What event is celebrated on Pentecost Sunday?
- 2) In Acts 2, what were the believers speaking about in other tongues?
- 3) Who did Paul encounter in Ephesus in Acts 19:1-6?
- 4) What happens when Paul lays his hands on the disciples in Ephesus?

Interpretation

- 1) What does the word 'megaleios' mean in the context of Acts 2?
- 2) Why might Paul have asked the disciples if they received the Holy Spirit?

- 3) How are tongues described as both earthly and heavenly languages?
- 4) What does the sermon suggest about the modern understanding of prophecy?

Application

- 1) How can understanding 'megaleios' change the way we speak about God today?
- 2) What steps could you take to discover your spiritual gifts?
- 3) How might you respond to a prophetic word given to you?
- 4) How can you test if a prophecy is truly from God?