



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

October 1, 2017

“Prophecy Part 1: God’s Insights” (How to Pray Series)

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We are in a series on How to Pray, and we have looked at prayer in so many different ways. In a few weeks I will preach on praying in tongues, which you might find intriguing and fun. But today and next Sunday I want to talk about the misunderstood gift of prophecy, which is talked about a lot in the Bible. Unfortunately, many of us do not have a clear understanding of how it fits into our personal prayer life.

There is no way I can give a complete, comprehensive talk on prophesying in 30 minutes, so I am going to do part I today and part II next Sunday. Today, I am going to give an overview that might whet your appetite to investigate more about this and see if this is an unused muscle in your prayer life. Prophecy is an extremely important spiritual gift in the church.

The running theme in our sermon series is that we want to learn how to have a prayer life that is supernatural without being weird, whether it has to do with healing, intercession, tongues, or prophecy.

First let’s have a definition of the word *prophecy*. We are not talking about a crystal ball for the future. It’s not really about predicting the future, like who will win the next 49er game, which will probably not be them. Prophecy in the New Testament is not talking about being able to pick stocks to become richer (though that might make us more interested in this topic today).

Here is what prophecy means in the Bible: Prophecy is God’s supernatural insight given to us to strengthen, comfort, and encourage a group or persons.

This is key. It’s basically thoughts sent to us in our minds and hearts from God to do three things: to strengthen, comfort and encourage others. Prayer should be a two-way street –we talk to God and God talks to us. So in prophetic prayer, God is talking to us to give us supernatural insight. The Bible speaks a lot about prophecy. Let me share a few verses that the apostle Paul wrote to a church in Corinth:

1Cor. 14:1 Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.

1Cor. 14:31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.

1Cor. 14:39 So, my friends, be eager to prophesy...

1Cor. 14:3 But those who prophesy speak to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

While there are prophets in the Old Testament who predicted the future, I am talking about the prophecy described in the New Testament. Prophecy in the New Testament was not a warning of doom and gloom, as we may have seen in a Hollywood movie where a man in a robe with a long beard is saying, “Thus saith the Lord: the end is

near! A tragedy will wipe away your town unless you repent!”

In the New Testament and in our world today, when God gives us a prophecy, it is meant for us to share it with love with the person or persons the prophecy was meant for. Prophecy is really all about God’s kindness, mercy and compassion. It might point to the future, but that is not the main goal. Rather, it is to share God’s love.

So how does that work? In the book *Everyday Supernatural*, written by Mike Pilavachi and Andy Croft (both friends of the church), Mike shares a story of how he was about to leave an airport in England only to discover that he forgot his passport. So he called his friend Ali to rush to his house to get his passport and to quickly deliver it to him at the airport.

When Ali arrived at the airport, it was too late. Mike’s plane was leaving. As Mike and Ali were walking to Ali’s car, both feeling so dejected and frustrated, they noticed a man standing by himself with his suitcase beside him. A thought flashed through Mike’s mind that said, “That man needs encouragement. Go and pray for him.”

Mike normally dismisses such thoughts, but he said he made a big mistake. He mentioned it to his friend Ali. And Ali got all excited about it. She said, “This has never happened to me before. It’s like one of those Christian books. Let’s go and pray for him!”

Mike assured her it was just a passing thought, and he was really tired and frustrated in missing his flight and he just wanted to go home. But Ali excitedly replied, with the question that we should always ask: "What if it's from God?"

Mike realized he would be disappointing Ali if they didn't follow up, so he said, "Okay, let's walk past and see if God says anything else." So they walked past the man, but nothing else came to them. So they walked past him again. Still nothing. They walked past the man literally seven times back and forth. No new word or action regarding the man.

Finally, out of desperation, Mike went up to the man and said, "Excuse me, sir. We're not weird, but we think Jesus told us that you need encouragement, and we wondered if we could pray for you." The man looked astonished. He said, "I've just arrived in this country to pastor a church in Essex. I've been waiting for two of the elders of the church to collect me but they're late. I've been standing here thinking, 'What on earth have I done? Why am I here?' And I just prayed a little while ago, 'God, I would love it if you would give me some encouragement before they arrive to get me.'"

Mike said he was more amazed than he. So they prayed for him and went on their way rejoicing. [*Everyday Supernatural by Mike Pilavachi & Andy Croft, David C. Cook, 2016, pp. 13-14.*]

What is prophecy for? Foretell the future? No. Prophecy is to strengthen, comfort, and encourage. A prophetic word is never to criticize, judge, or condemn a person. It is never to tell someone to repent or what they should do with their life.

Sometimes when God talks to us in our prayers, it might not make sense, and we are put in a tremendous awkward position and we wonder if we should say anything. Mike Pilavachi has told our church about the time he was silently praying for a pastor and his wife. And all he could think about was the song

Dancing Queen by the 70's Swedish music group called ABBA. He thought, "This is crazy!" So he tried to block it from his head and the lyrics pounded even more in his mind.

Then he was asked, to prophesy over the couple. He was scared. He looked at the pastor's wife and with panic in his heart, and said, "Um, I wonder if the Lord wants to say to you, in the words of ABBA, 'You can dance; you can jive; having the time of your life.'"

Mike felt like a complete fool and then the couple started laughing. Mike was about to get out of his chair and leave the room in embarrassment. Then the wife said, "Three weeks ago I started a dance group in my church for the worship times, and as we were driving here tonight I said to my husband, 'I'm going to cancel the dance group. What was I thinking starting it?' I shook my head and said to him, 'I can't dance. I can't dance.'"

Mike was totally shocked. Never could he have imagined that God would use him to help another by giving the lyrics of a 70's Swedish pop group! [*Ibid. pp. 117-120*]

Here's the song, which will show us how crazy that thought was. (A video clip of Abba singing *Dancing Queen* was shown.)

Mama Mia! By the way, sometimes videos are seen by 15,000 people or maybe 50,000. But that video has been seen more than 200 million times! Lots of people like it! They sold more than 500 million records, and a few years ago were offered one billion dollars to go on tour again. They said no! Money, money, money. It's a rich man's world!

And by the way did you know that the word *Abba* is the Aramaic word Jesus used for God the Heavenly Father. Abba Father? Maybe, like another Abba song we are saying to God "Take a chance, take a chance on me." Golly I can't believe in the last 60 seconds I just rattled off five Abba song titles!

Back to the sermon. So some of you might be thinking right now, "I wish I could help others with God speaking supernaturally to me. And that is good. That is why Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: "So, my friends, be eager to prophesy ..." (1 Cor 14:39)

But you may be thinking, "I would really want to be able to supernaturally prophesy, but I don't think I am spiritual enough. I don't think that God can use me." But friends, that is why we look to the Bible for our guide. Whenever we think that God can't use us, we need to review who the heroes in the Bible were that God used and transformed: Noah was a drunk. Abraham too old. Isaac a daydreamer. Jacob a liar. Leah was told she was not pretty. Joseph in the Old Testament was abused and incarcerated. Moses was a stutterer and a murderer. Gideon was a chicken. Samson was a flirt. Rahab was a prostitute. David was an adulterer and murderer. Elijah was suicidal. Jonah tried to flee from God. Peter denied Christ often. Thomas was a doubter. Zacchaeus was a financial cheat. Paul murdered Christians. And Lazarus was dead. If Jesus used such sinners, including a dead person, I think He can use even you.

But how does God talk to us? I think God talks to us in basically four ways:

1) THROUGH WORDS

First it can be in words. Sometimes it is not for someone else but for ourselves. I remember when I first started dating Pam, and I was afraid I would lose her. What if she doesn't go out with me again? I was super stressed about it. Then one day while in the shower, where God talks to me a lot, I heard words that said, "Let her be a gift from Me." A gift from you? And that made me incredibly calm after that, and 36 years later we're still together!

Back in the day when we were thinking of moving to a new campus, AND BEFORE we even knew about Ko'olau, someone asked me what I thought our new campus should look like.

I said I think the new campus will be beautiful, elegant but not opulent. It will have wide hallways to receive thousands of people. It will be nice, like an embassy that represents another country as we will be representing the Kingdom of God. There will be a lot of greenery and water and fountains, and it will have a fireplace. Then everyone in the room laughed and someone said hardly anyone in Hawaii has a fireplace.

I said but I can see that there will be a time when, at Christmas time, people will gather around a piano near the fireplace and sing Christmas carols, for a fireplace represents warmth and togetherness. I didn't know it at the time but that was God speaking to me prophetically. And sure enough four months after we moved in to Ko'olau, our own Eileen Lum led Christmas carols by the fireplace in the Fireside Room in the other wing between worship services!

Another story: Years later, I was praying by myself at the top of the stairs looking at the cross hanging in the atrium in the other wing, and I told the Lord, "You know, I thought we were going to get a place that is elegant but not opulent, but maybe this place is too opulent and not just elegant. I mean marble floors, columns, and walls. Way too much!"

And suddenly I heard a loud voice in my head say, "Dan, this IS MY HOUSE!" And I said, "Oh Lord, you chose this place to give us; so sorry I said what I said!"

In the Bible, the House of God was made of the finest cedars of Lebanon, the finest woods and precious metals, and if this is the place the Lord chose and wanted for His church, the bride of Christ, and He provided it for us, who am I to question that? It would be one thing if WE put in the marble floors, columns, and walls. But we bought it already turnkey as it was, and that is what God wanted. Thank you God! And who would have guessed we would have paid it off in 11 years! Thank you Lord, and thank you, you committed people of First Prez!

But 99% of the time when God speaks to me and to others who have any kind of prophetic experience, it is a faint voice, a faint thought, like remembering a childhood memory. A distant thought so distant that you even wonder, "Was that really God or me?"

God speaks to us in the quiet. He whispers to us and doesn't shout. In an Old Testament book in the Bible called 1 Kings in the 19th chapter we read of a man, a prophet, named Elijah who has just won a great victory against leaders of a pagan god called Baal. Elijah was exhausted and depressed after that victory, and so he ran to a cave in a place called Mount Horeb, hoping to pray and listen for God's voice. And here is what happened:

1Kings 19:11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.

1Kings 19:12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

1Kings 19:13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

The Lord was not there in that earthquake or in the wind or in the fire. No, the surprising reality is that He spoke in a gentle whisper and that's how I believe God normally speaks.

2) THROUGH DREAMS

In the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, God spoke to Joseph through an angel in a dream and told Joseph to take Mary and baby Jesus and run to Egypt or else they would be killed by King Herod.

Centuries earlier God talked to a different Joseph of the Old Testament in dreams to save his family and Egypt.

3) THROUGH PICTURES

Recently, I was praying for a Scottish gentleman at a conference and I gave him a prophetic word. I said, "I saw a picture of a rhinoceros. Something has happened in your life and perhaps today it is like you have a tough skin like a rhinoceros, but God is going to show you His tender kindness and mercy."

After I said that I thought to myself, "Gee, a rhinoceros! I'm such an idiot. I hope that fulfills the requirement that all prophecy should be strengthening, encouraging and comforting."

Two days later at the conference that had 5,000 people, the man I prayed for found me in the bookstore. He said, "I have been looking all over for you. When you gave me that prophetic word, about the rhinoceros I didn't like it, in fact it angered me. But then last night during the worship time, God spoke to me and I broke down crying. I did have a rhinoceros hide, and God broke through. I felt in a new way God's loving, tender love.

"I realized I had a hard, prideful heart and I was blocking him, but God broke through last night. I prayed that I could find you at this conference to say thank you. Thank you so much for your prayer."

4) THROUGH IMPRESSIONS

Let me tell you a prophetic story that on the surface sounds so elegant, bold, confident and easy but then I will tell you what was really happening.

Mike Pilavachi was at one of his *Soul Survivor* events that ministers to teenagers and at this event there were 9,000 youth there. At the end of the worship he confidently went up to the lectern and said, "I think there is someone here called Sam. You're not a Christian and you said to your friend this morning, 'If they make an invitation for people to give their lives to Jesus tonight, I think I might come forward.'"

Well, Sam, now is your time, where are you? Come forward, Jesus wants to meet you.”

There was a long pause. But it didn't worry Mike. He looked around for Sam to appear. A young boy got up and people around him began to clap. He walked ten paces and then sat down again.

After what seemed like ages a young man slowly walked forward and when he came to the edge of the stage, Mike asked, “Are you Sam?” The young boy was trembling and he nodded his head. There in front of nine thousand people Sam gave his life for the Lord and he got a standing ovation. As he walked back, a friend ran up to him and the two of them were seen crying together as they walked back to their seats.

The next day Mike was told by others in Sam's youth group that Sam had indeed been far from God for a long time but he had told his friend in the morning that he might give his life to Jesus if there were an invitation.

Now if I just told you the story as is you would think, golly Mike has so much confidence that this story is told in such a way that Mike is like super spiritual! It is such an elegant story of courage and boldness. But let me explain this story more completely.

Mike told me that story privately but also publicly and both times he explained the full story. And I share this, as Mike also shared this in his book of how prophecy REALLY works with all of its humble insecurity and wondering if this is really God. Let me retell that same story as Mike explains what was REALLY happening in his head.

Mike said a thought came into his head, “There's someone here called Sam who said to his friend if the invitation is given, he'll become a Christian. Mike said, “My initial reaction was, ‘We did a call for salvation last night! We can't do another one! And anyway, it doesn't fit in with my

talk on prophecy tonight.” And then he thought, “Okay, if I do the talk then I'll quickly say it as a tag on at the end.”

And then the thought came into his head, “No, Mike, I want you to do it now.” He said, “I objected strongly. What if it's me [thinking these things]? I thought what if there's no Sam? What if there is a Sam and he doesn't come forward? If I say it now and then no one comes, I've then got to give a talk on the gift of prophecy. I will have a lost all credibility. They will wonder why they should listen to a talk on the gift of prophet from someone who is a false prophet.”

So Mike then tried to give his original talk instead and not talk about Sam. But he couldn't get his thoughts in order. He then felt that the Lord was saying to him, “Is your credibility the most important thing here?”

Mike then knew that if he didn't go for it he would regret it for days. So he decided to go for it, but even as he was about to speak he heard other words in his mind saying, “You idiot.”

So he gave the prophecy and remember in the beginning nothing happened. So his mind began to plan, “what shall I say if Sam doesn't respond?”

And remember no one initially responded. Mike was in agony. And he said to himself, “Why did you have to say this in front of nine thousand young people? Of course no one is going to come forward!”

Then the first guy got up and began to walk forward, he thought, “Thank God!” But when he sat down, Mike said he wished the ground would swallow him up. He stared to make bargains with God. “Please get me out of this. I'll do whatever you want. I'll be a missionary to Wales if you want me to.”

Then when the real Sam started to walk forward, Mike was convinced that he was just heading back to his place and

he would sit down. When he actually walked up to the stage and said that his name was Sam, and he wanted to give his life to Jesus, Mike nearly passed out. Mike said and wrote this in his book, “Not once did I feel like God's man of faith and power. Instead, I “despaired of life itself.” (2 Cor. 1:8). (*Ibid.* pp. 117-118)

The big thing is that Mike was obedient. And as he often says, “If I am wrong, no one dies. You just face embarrassment, but no one dies.”

And as we get more practiced in prophetic prayer, we realize we just have to do whatever God tells us.

Next week, I am going to talk about how we will know if a prophecy is false or true is it really from God or not? Plus I will talk about how we can learn to do this kind of prayer.

But before we celebrate COMMUNION, elders and deacons can now get into place, I want to say this. This needs to be understood about prophetic prayer. As Mike and Andy Croft would say: **When we pray, it is not that we are getting more of the Spirit but that He is getting more of us.**

And that is what I want for our church—that the Holy Spirit would be getting more and more of us, filling us, leading us in our thoughts and actions and prayers. As the Holy Spirit gets more of us, we realize how much God loves us, and one of the greatest prophecies throughout the Old Testament was that God would be coming to earth.

And then in the New Testament we see that He has touched down in the person of Jesus Christ. This Jesus not only talked to people 2,000 years ago, but He talks to us through prophetic thoughts today. And if ever we want to know whether this God really cares about us, we must remember that He gave His life for us. He gave us a sacrament, which we call communion to remember His great love for us.