

God Speaks, Part 2: Prophecy (Because of the Gospel)

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, May 21, 2023
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 12; 1 Corinthians 14; Isaiah 41; Isaiah 46; 1 Peter 4
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:02:25 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

God is living and active, and he speaks — whether or not we have vocabulary for it. Prophecy is his own knowledge, which no one else possesses, whispered to his servants so that the church is built up and Christ is glorified. Which means the right posture toward it is not politeness but earnest desire, held together by plain honesty.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ♦ Hearing God rarely arrives as a voice. Matt described it as a desk getting swept clean and one new thing set on it — as though a third party had rearranged his own thoughts.
- ♦ Paul's run of questions in 1 Corinthians 12 expects the answer no. Not all are prophets — but not being called to a gifting is different from not being able to ask God for help and serve when you can.
- ♦ Prophecy is the higher gift because of what it does to a room: it builds up, encourages, consoles, convicts, and shows an outsider that God is really present.
- ♦ Prophetic ministry in Scripture is not confined to the future. God speaks about the past, the present, and even hypotheticals that never come to pass.
- ♦ A prophetic word is almost never bare information. It is godward — an invitation, a challenge, a summons, a rebuke.
- ♦ Supernatural is not the test by itself. Moses told Israel to ignore a wonder-worker whose signs came true but whose message led away from God.

- ◆ "Thus saith the Lord" is a power play. If disagreeing with you means disagreeing with God, the church has lost its ability to discern anything.
- ◆ Charismatics, Baptists and Pentecostals often describe the same experience in three different vocabularies. Matt wants the experience without the flair.

► 1:02:25

Hope Chapel is in the middle of 1 Corinthians, and the letter has arrived at the section on spiritual gifts. Rather than walk straight into it, Matt spent two weeks on the approach — first on having eyes to see and ears to hear, which has less to do with technique than with whether we come to God in pride or with a heart that is broken and open. Part one left one thread hanging: God is living and active, and his sheep hear his voice. What does that actually feel like? That is what part two is for.

1. A word in a Walmart

► 1:06:15

Matt opened the old journal before he told the story, and said why: a church that intends to use the spiritual gifts runs on honesty and integrity, and he does not trust his memory of a testimony over what he wrote down at the time. He also wants the gifts to be normal in both senses — more common than they are, and unremarkable in presentation. "You don't have to wear a jumpsuit that has sequins on it to operate in the gifts of the Spirit."

Years ago he was walking the aisles of a Walmart praying for strangers, not shopping, just blessing people and asking God for anything he might want to say. Twenty or thirty minutes of nothing. He got discouraged, which he now finds funny — he imagines meeting Jeremiah one day and admitting he gave it half an hour.

► 1:08:10

On his last lap he passed an employee stocking shelves, and the description of what happened next is the most useful thing in the message. "If your mind was a desk, it got swept clean." All the ordinary traffic — bless this person, I might buy that later, I'm hungry — was replaced with a single word: *yes*. He asked God what that meant, and his thoughts were rearranged a second time, confusion swapped for confidence. "It felt like a third party rearranged my thoughts."

So he told the man he might sound strange, but that he thought the man had been praying, and the answer was *yes*. The man's reply, as Matt wrote it down that day: *that makes perfect sense, I've been asking if anyone up there is even listening to me*. He turned out to be a Christian who had drifted into paganism

and was trying to fight evil powers with what he had picked up on his own. They talked a long time, and Matt urged him toward Christ's authority and back into a church.

2. Open is not the same as wanting it

► 1:10:59

Most of us, Matt said, are open to the gifts of the Spirit the way he is open to a Pop-Tart. If you go get it, open it, toast it, put it on a plate and bring it to him, he will probably take a bite. "I'm not gonna stop you, but I don't want it." Paul's word is stronger than that, and the reason to want it is not mainly duty. It is that co-laboring with Christ is a relational thing, closer to building something with one of your kids than to completing a task, and it takes the weight off. "You offload the burden of being Jesus. You are not the savior of the world, and the world is a bottomless pit of need."

3. What Paul actually says

► 1:13:05

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7 ↗

► 1:15:25

After the long body metaphor, Paul fires off a series of questions, and Matt pressed on how to read them.

"Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts."

1 CORINTHIANS 12:29-31 ↗

The expected answer is no, every time — Paul does not set a pattern and break it in the middle. Teaching is the clearest test case: we are not all called to be teachers, and yet any of us could prepare and give a lesson. Work backward through the list on that logic. We are not all prophets, and that does not mean you cannot hear the Lord and speak. We do not all have the gift of healing, and we should all

be praying for the sick anyway. There is a difference between a calling with a strong gifting attached and the ordinary availability of asking God for help and serving where you can.

4. Especially that you may prophesy

► 1:19:07

"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation."

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-3 ↗

Notice the two halves. Pursuing love is for everyone — nobody gets to trade it for a gifting, as though the prophetic were a specialty and love the general track. And the love chapter sits between the two halves of Paul's argument on purpose: it is how the gifts are exercised, not an alternative to them.

► 1:21:15

Why the higher gift, then? Because of what Paul says happens when an outsider walks into a room where it is operating.

"But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you."

1 CORINTHIANS 14:24-25 ↗

5. What prophecy is, taken across the whole Bible

► 1:22:28

Matt then ran a fast tour rather than a close reading. The starting definition is Moses': a prophet speaks supernaturally and calls people to faithfulness to God alone. Both halves matter. A dreamer whose sign actually comes true, but who then says *let us go after other gods*, is to be ignored ([Deuteronomy 13:1-3](#)) — and a word that simply does not come to pass was not the Lord's ([Deuteronomy 18:22](#)).

► 1:25:04

In Isaiah, God mocks the idols — a man cuts down a tree, cooks his dinner over half of it and worships the other half (Isaiah 44:14–17) — and then challenges them to a test they cannot pass:

"Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come. Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified."

ISAIAH 41:22–23 ↗

Matt enjoyed that one. "This is God being edgy, and I like that." The point underneath it is that God holds knowledge no other power holds — "declaring the end from the beginning" — and he can whisper it to his servants. He allowed the obvious footnote: a demon can supply a fortune teller, as with the slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16:16–18). That does not touch the claim.

► 1:27:02

But the future is only part of it. Hiding in Keilah, David asked whether Saul would come and whether the men of the city would hand him over; God said yes to both, David left, and neither thing happened (1 Samuel 23:9–13). God knows contingent hypotheticals, which Matt called totally trippy and beyond comprehension. God also speaks about the past — Samuel greets a stranger hunting lost donkeys with the news that the animals were found three days ago, and by the way, you are the man of the hour (1 Samuel 9:18–20). And about the present, as when Peter tells Simon, "I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

► 1:30:16

Then Jonah, whose entire prophetic ministry concerned an event that did not occur.

"Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them."

JONAH 3:4–5 ↗

A concise message from a man whose heart was not in it, and no judgment at the end of it — because the word carried a challenge, and the challenge worked. That is the pattern across the prophetic literature, and Matt read one more piece of it to make the point.

► 1:31:21

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

ISAIAH 55:6-7 ↗

"Is that about the future, the past, the present? That's an invitation — that's what that is." A huge chunk of the prophetic literature is exactly that: an invitation, a challenge, a rebuke, a call, a summons. Christ's word to the church at Ephesus commends its endurance and then names what it has lost (Revelation 2:3-4). Past, present, future, hypothetical, rebuke, summons — the common thread is not the tense. It is that the word is godward, drawn toward him, and it lands on the purpose Peter states:

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies — in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

1 PETER 4:10-11 ↗

6. And what it is not

► 1:33:54

Two disqualifiers. Signs and wonders that genuinely happen but lead away from God — impressive is not the standard, and Pharaoh's magicians threw down staffs that became serpents (Exodus 7:11-12). "Maybe impressive. But that's not a prophetic ministry. Don't follow it, don't listen to it." And anything God is not behind at all: compliments dressed up as revelation, or thoughts we simply generated ourselves. Which sends you back to the question of what it actually feels like when he does speak — and Matt said plainly he hopes not to be the only one in the room willing to describe that.

7. A checkout line at H-E-B

► 1:35:03

The second story is recent and deliberately unspiritual in setting. Matt was unloading groceries, one of his kids was crying, and he was not thinking about prophecy at all. He looked at the cashier, and the desk got wiped again: *why am I thinking about how the Lord sees her sorrow?* She did not look sad. He told her anyway — that God sees her pain and her struggles and is with her — and she started crying while

continuing to scan items, because the register counts items per minute and she could not stop. He felt terrible about the timing and prayed for her to have peace. Months later he saw her twice more, and she told him she was back in church with her daughter. "It wasn't like I was being real spiritual. The execution wasn't flawless." It did not have to be.

► 1:36:34

What he told her in that conversation is his standing counsel for a believer who has stopped going to church: start where you were. "Why don't you start with where you were going — go back there." He has brought people to Hope, but he would rather someone repair an old connection than burn a bridge and end up isolated because of it. And the reason he keeps this story is the rarest part of it — you almost never get to see the fruit, and seeing it makes him want to do this more. "Which is why we should earnestly desire it."

8. Guardrails, because this is a church

► 1:37:53

Matt warned the room he was about to get rulesy, and then did. You do not get to address this church however and whenever you want; words go through leadership, and they have to be biblical. If someone asks to give a prophetic word, a leader says lay it on me, and the answer is *I don't want to tell you* — that is the end of it. "Then the answer is no, you can't. Sorry. Actually, not sorry." He recounted a man at Hope years ago who wanted to give half his message to leadership and said the Lord would supply the rest only once he had delivered the first half in public. The answer was no — share the part you have, and if God gives you more, call it a halftime.

► 1:39:25

He reserved his strongest language for a formula. "I strongly discourage 'thus saith the Lord' — strongly. Because if I disagree with you, am I disagreeing with God? That's a power play." He has been told God requires a trumpet during his sermon. He has been on the receiving end of *God told me you have to give me a hundred bucks* — "well, I don't want to disobey God, but are you sure?" He has heard of men informing a woman that God has assigned her to marry them. "Oh, did he? Did he though?" Say instead *I think this, and here is why* — because that can be weighed, and the unfalsifiable version cannot. Paul's list of what prophecy is for is short and none of it is self-serving: upbuilding, encouragement, consolation, conviction of sin, the disclosing of secrets, the demonstration that God is really among us.

► 1:40:59

Peter's clause is the same test pointed at the speaker: *in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ* — not us being glorified through our own selfish ambition. So Matt wants a certain

reluctance in anyone who gets up in front of a crowd. "I would want somebody to feel a little bit of trepidation before you address a large group of people. This isn't just 'here's how we get our thrills today.'"

9. How to grow in it

► 1:41:33

Start with what you already have: if you have been drawn to Christ, you have already been moved by something other than the spirit of this world. Then take extended time in prayer with paper. The to-do list will come — write it down and move on, and consider that some of it may be the Lord telling you to call someone. Sins will come to mind; confess them, and write down what repentance will require. Picture God's nearness, because it is simply a fact. Keep a record of where you feel moved to obey and which passages surface. You may end the hour without having heard a voice and still have been spoken to at length.

► 1:43:26

And do it with people. "Doing this without trust" does not work, because you need honest feedback from people who know you and are committed to Jesus and to walking biblically — thinking a thing does not make it so. He named the concrete step rather than leaving it abstract: join a small group, and Wednesday nights are the place for growing in praying and listening for the voice of the Lord.

► 1:44:00

Then, "speaking of honesty" — he admitted he never wrote a conclusion, and recapped from the platform. Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially the higher ones; prophecy is the one Paul names, and he explains what it is for. Really want it, but do not force it into something weird. Stay honest and humble and normal, and just say the true thing: "If it was a dream, just say it was a dream."

► 1:45:18

That is where the denominational observation landed, out of a life spent among Lutherans, Episcopalians, Baptists and charismatics: a Baptist says *brother, your family has been on my heart and I've been praying for you out of Jeremiah*; a charismatic says *I feel like God is speaking to me from Jeremiah and I'm declaring it over your family*; a Pentecostal says *God woke me up and told me to open to Jeremiah*. Often the same experience, three vocabularies. "The Lord speaks no matter who you are." He is not asking for the flair — flair spooks the people who would otherwise listen, and the room has weaker members in it as well as strong ones. He is asking for honesty, so that the thing is sustainable and can actually be discerned.

► 1:46:41

And then it stopped being instruction and became an appeal, which is the real answer to the two weeks of approach work. "It's so good. It's so good. Can you testify? Have you heard the voice of the Lord and you've walked in it and you're like, oh my goodness, this is so good — we should be doing this more. I don't know why I didn't do it earlier." We should want it that much. He prayed it rather than summarizing it: "God, thank you so much for the way you do speak. We trust you. We entrust ourselves to your shepherding. I ask that you would help us walk in this gift to glorify God through Jesus Christ all the more." Discernment and tongues are coming on other Sundays.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [John 10:27](#)
- [1 Corinthians 12:4–7](#)
- [1 Corinthians 12:29–31](#)
- [1 Corinthians 14:1–3](#)
- [1 Corinthians 14:24–25](#)
- [Deuteronomy 13:1–3](#)
- [Deuteronomy 18:22](#)
- [Isaiah 44:14–17](#)
- [Isaiah 41:22–23](#)
- [Isaiah 46:9–10](#)
- [Acts 16:16–18](#)
- [1 Samuel 23:9–13](#)
- [1 Samuel 9:18–20](#)
- [Acts 8:23](#)
- [Jonah 3:4–5](#)
- [Isaiah 55:6–7](#)
- [Revelation 2:3–4](#)
- [1 Peter 4:10–11](#)
- [Exodus 7:11–12](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt described his thoughts being swept clean and rearranged, with no voice involved. Has anything like that happened to you, and what did you do with it?
2. Where are you merely open to the gifts of the Spirit, in the Pop-Tart sense, and what would earnestly desiring them actually look like for you?
3. Paul says prophecy builds up, encourages and consoles the church. When has someone's word done that for you, and what made it land?
4. Why is "I think God is saying this, and here is why" safer for a church than "thus saith the Lord"? What does the first one make possible that the second one prevents?
5. Matt suggested extended prayer with a pen, writing down the to-do list, the sins and the passages that surface. What is one time this week you could try that, and who will you tell about it?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=077DbM8UnJ4&t=3745s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.