

Does God Still Speak?

The living God is not a mute idol — and how a church can hear him safely

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, February 9, 2020
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 14:1-29; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Hebrews 12:24-25; Romans 8:14-16; John 10:27; Deuteronomy 18:15-22; Jeremiah 18:1-10; Ephesians 1:17
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:00:00 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Prophecy in the Bible was never mere fortune-telling; it is God speaking, and the living God is not a mute idol. He still leads, testifies to and disciplines his children, and the gift of prophecy builds up the church without competing with Scripture, which remains the measure of everything. So pursue love, eagerly desire the gifts, be honest about what you think you heard, and weigh the word — not the person.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Biblical prophecy wasn't only prediction. Some was conditional, some spoke to the present or past; all of it carried God's authority.
- ◆ Scripture assumes God still speaks: his sheep know his voice, the Spirit leads and testifies, and Hebrews warns us not to refuse "him who is speaking."
- ◆ Christians from different streams often describe the same experience in different words. Honesty matters more than vocabulary.
- ◆ Prophecy doesn't compete with Scripture any more than daily bread competes with God the Provider. It shows how true Scripture is.
- ◆ Gifts are not Green Lantern rings. They remain subject to God's will, and the church still relies on wisdom, Scripture and elders.

- ◆ Paul says to pursue love and earnestly desire the gifts, especially prophecy, because it builds up, encourages and consoles.
- ◆ Never say “thus says the Lord.” Say “I think,” let the one receiving be in control, and weigh the word, not the person.

► 0:00:00

On a rainy morning, Matt set out to talk about prophecy in the Bible and in the local church — and noted that it had already started during worship.

More than fortune-telling

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We can get hung up on definitions, using the same words in different ways, so Matt widened the question: does God still speak? Even in the Old Testament, prophecy was not just predicting the future.

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Sometimes it was: Moses gives the test that a prophet whose word doesn't come true need not be feared, and predicts “a prophet like me from among you” — Jesus ([Deuteronomy 18:15–22](#)). But sometimes it was conditional. At the potter's wheel God tells Jeremiah that if a nation under judgment turns, he may relent ([Jeremiah 18:1–10](#)). Jonah announced “Forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” ([Jonah 3:4](#)), and forty days later the city was spared.

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Some prophecy addressed the present: Nathan's parable of the poor man's one lamb ended with “You are the man!” ([2 Samuel 12:1–7](#)). Some addressed the past: Samuel told Saul not to worry about the donkeys lost three days before ([1 Samuel 9:20](#)). What are they? “Statements from God. The authority of the statement is rooted in God's own authority.”

Why Matt believes God speaks

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He has personal reasons too. Growing up, he had spiritual experiences he never mentioned for fear of looking weird, and was grateful whenever a pastor raised the subject: “Okay, I'm not crazy.”

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In high school, on one of the saddest days of his life after a betrayal by friends, he wandered into the open prayer room of a Catholic church a mile from home and was suddenly given the grace to forgive. “That wasn’t from me. I didn’t have the strength for that.” He also sensed God putting on his heart a ministry of reconciliation. “Did God say that to me? Yes. How did he say it? He put it in my heart.”

► 0:05:41

He keeps a journal of such moments, written the same day so he won’t embellish later. Prayer-walking at Target, the “blank slate” of a stranger turned into: she needs God’s fatherly love. He told her so, and she said she had just been thinking about big issues with her dad. On a sidewalk, it was as if the Lord dropped a fact into his “shared folder”: this man has three kids. He asked; the man said yes, and it gave Matt credibility to talk about Jesus. “I didn’t hear an angelic choir.” So, he admitted, “I’m biased when I read the Scriptures. I think God talks.”

Objection one: God is done speaking

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Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice” ([John 10:27](#)). How do they know it if he never uses it? How does the Shepherd lead to still waters, his rod and staff comfort us ([Psalm 23](#)), or turn a king’s heart like water ([Proverbs 21:1](#)), if he doesn’t interact with us?

► 0:09:26

Paul prays for the Ephesians to receive “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” ([Ephesians 1:17](#)) — why, if all there is is the Bible? “Because God wants to know you as a father, not just as a book.” Hebrews says not to regard lightly the Lord’s discipline ([Hebrews 12:5–6](#)); how does he reprove without communicating?

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“... and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.”

HEBREWS 12:24–25 ↗

Not “him who has spoken” — him who is speaking. And Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever ([Hebrews 13:8](#)). “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God,” present tense, and “the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit” ([Romans 8:14–16](#)). How do you testify without communicating?

► 0:11:00

And to Christians walking in sin, Paul says, “that is not the way you learned Christ — assuming that you have heard about him” (Ephesians 4:20–21). Many translations add “about”; it simply says “heard him.” “If you belong to him at all, I know you know his voice already, by default.”

Same experience, different words

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Matt grew up Missouri Synod Lutheran, then Episcopalian, and went on mission trips alongside charismatic Episcopalians and Baptists. He suspects the stream you come from shapes the words you use for the same thing.

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Imagine three men encouraging a discouraged Matt. A very conservative Baptist: “Brother, I was praying for you and thinking about Joshua chapter one; I pray courage for you.” An Episcopalian open to the gifts: “I feel like the Lord put that chapter on my heart, and I’m speaking that over your life.” A Pentecostal: “I was in the Spirit this morning and the Lord spoke to me from Joshua” (Joshua 1:9). “I can’t perceive what’s actually happening to someone just based on the words they’re saying.” So: “Honesty is the best policy. Just be really honest with what you feel, and I will not nitpick the way you say it.”

Objection two: prophecy competes with Scripture

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Some say prophecy was a tool for establishing Scripture, so with the canon closed it is done. But a screwdriver tightens outlet covers; once they are tight, you still need it for other things. Scripture is our canon, “and we will use it to measure all dogma from the church.”

► 0:14:43

Jesus taught us to pray “give us this day our daily bread” and “deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:11–13). Does God’s daily provision compete with the revelation of God as Provider? “No, it underscores it.” The Spirit’s daily, non-canonical work “doesn’t compete with the revelation about God in Scripture, but shows us how true it really is.” Do pastors compete with the Good Shepherd if they do a good job? “Especially not.”

► 0:16:40

And Paul clearly expected prophetic words that were not Scripture. When an unbeliever walks in and “the secrets of his heart are disclosed,” is that Scripture? “Probably not.” Paul didn’t see it as a threat to biblical authority; “if it wasn’t a conflict of interest then, it’s probably not a conflict of interest now.”

Objection three: people abuse it

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“Yeah, sure. People also abuse their mouths by saying horrible things, and I’m not gonna be mute for that.” One trap is a cartoonish idea of gifts, “like the Green Lantern — he gets a ring and he can just use it however he wishes.” All the gifts remain subject to God’s will. Otherwise, why did Epaphroditus, Timothy and Trophimus endure lingering illness ([Philippians 2:25–27](#); [1 Timothy 5:23](#); [2 Timothy 4:20](#))?

► 0:18:22

The wind blows where it wishes ([John 3:8](#)). “If I could, I would never leave Walmart. I would be right next to the greeter giving words.”

► 0:19:09

Prophecy isn’t a cure-all. Paul asks whether no one is wise enough to settle disputes ([1 Corinthians 6:5](#)), not “just ask the prophets.” He set up elders in every town, not prophets; Scripture says to be subject to elders, and an elder must be able to teach, not to prophesy. “Prophecy has its place, but not to be abused. And a fear of abuse leads some to just never engage, and I don’t think that’s the way to go.” We are told to eagerly desire it.

What Paul says about the gifts

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“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1–2 ↗

The first contrast: idols are mute by default, “because they’re actually just logs and stones people carved and painted. The living God is not mute.”

► 0:21:41

Varieties of gifts, one Spirit; “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” — wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation, “who

apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1 Corinthians 12:4–11). One body, many members; not all are prophets or apostles; “but earnestly desire the higher gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:12–31). Then chapter 13, love — “which we just read at an awesome, fantastic wedding recently.”

► 0:23:20

“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ... The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.”

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1–5 ↗

► 0:24:02

We seek the Giver, yes — and his gifts, because the Giver wants to give them. “If you hang out with a gift giver long enough, it’s gonna come up. He’s gonna want to give you a gift.” And though Jesus is the builder of his church, prophecy building it up is no conflict: “we’re co-laborers.”

► 0:25:42

If all speak in tongues, outsiders will say you are out of your minds. “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted 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 14:23–25).

Making room for it

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The encouragements shared during worship that morning, Matt noted, were laden with Scripture — the lifting of holy hands, intercession, fathers in the family. “We should want to hear from our Father.” So rather than only teach on prophecy, he wanted the church to exercise it, and called forward prayer encouragers who had been praying for two weeks about how God might speak through them.

► 0:29:51

“There have been times in my life where I just want to quit all ministry for all time ... and I’ve gotten encouragement from brothers and sisters, and it just blasts away the discouragement like you wouldn’t believe.”

Not that anyone had to be discouraged to come: “There’s no discrimination here for how encouraged you are.”

► 0:30:18

Prophecy’s purposes, he summarized: to edify, exhort and console; to convict and expose the heart; to teach; to direct ministry and warn, as in Acts; and, as Paul tells Timothy, to identify and impart spiritual gifts with the laying on of hands (1 Timothy 4:14).

How to do it safely

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Always be honest; never dress up your language to sound more spiritual. Matt prefers never to say “thus says the Lord,” because “then I put you in a position where you either agree with me or you disagree with God.” He says, “I think the Lord said this,” or asks, as on the street corner, “Do you have three kids?”

► 0:31:53

During worship there are unwritten rules: an encouragement is probably a green light, but run it by Geno, or Matt, first. Long experience, like a former teaching elder’s, earns a brighter green light. A warning or something heavy goes through a filter. If someone insists the Lord has condemnation for everyone who watches Ultimate Fighting Championship, “I might say, I don’t think that’s from God ... you can’t have my microphone. We don’t take our job as shepherds flippantly.”

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And “weigh the word, not the person” (1 Corinthians 14:29). If something Matt shares doesn’t land, it doesn’t mean he is worthless; maybe it wasn’t for them, or he misheard. A drummer played softly as people came forward — it helps people stay focused, and courteously masks the conversations.

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One of the encouragers added that a word received is like a fossil just beginning to show: take it back to the Father and ask him to uncover more, delicately. Geno stepped up to underline it: “We don’t consider these people up here to be infallible. We think the Word of God is infallible.” Their words are not on Scripture’s level, and the person receiving is in control, deciding whether it is for them and whether it is from God. “If anyone says to you ‘thus says the Lord,’ you need to tell me about it.”

► 0:37:59

“The Lord uses broken vessels to say amazing things that encourage us for years in our lives,” Geno said, “and that is an amazing work of the grace of God.” Matt closed by asking God to increase the

church's faith and sensitivity, and to encourage anyone discouraged, whether or not they came for prayer, "by the power of your Spirit."

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Deuteronomy 18:15–22
- Jeremiah 18:1–10
- Jonah 3:4
- 2 Samuel 12:1–7
- 1 Samuel 9:20
- John 10:27
- Psalm 23
- Proverbs 21:1
- Ephesians 1:17
- Hebrews 12:5–6
- Hebrews 12:24–25
- Hebrews 13:8
- Romans 8:14–16
- Ephesians 4:20–21
- Joshua 1:9
- Matthew 6:11–13
- Philippians 2:25–27
- 1 Timothy 5:23
- 2 Timothy 4:20
- John 3:8
- 1 Corinthians 6:5
- 1 Corinthians 12:1–2
- 1 Corinthians 12:4–11
- 1 Corinthians 12:12–31
- 1 Corinthians 14:1–5
- 1 Corinthians 14:23–25
- 1 Timothy 4:14
- 1 Corinthians 14:29

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. What words does your own church background give you for sensing God speak, and how might they differ from someone else's for the same experience?
2. Which of the Scriptures Matt raised most convinces you that God is "him who is speaking" today?
3. How does the daily-bread comparison help with the worry that prophecy competes with Scripture?
4. Why does it matter to say "I think the Lord said" rather than "thus says the Lord," and to weigh the word rather than the person?
5. Paul says to earnestly desire the gifts so that the church is built up. Whom could you ask God to give you an encouragement for this week?

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=yH6HPBd2Sd0&t=0s>

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.