The Wonderful Widespread Word Ministry

Text: Joel 2:28-29

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Joel 2:28-29, Luke 24:13-27, Ephesians 4:11-16

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 371, 419, 75, 389, 147

Series: Occasional

Theme: The prophet Joel foretells a time when all of God’s people, irrespective of gender, age or social status would be lavishly empowered by the Holy Spirit for the ministry of God’s revelation

Proposition: We are all (in Christ) empowered by the Spirit of God for ministry of the Word

**Introduction**

What images come to your mind when you hear the word ‘prophet’? Perhaps an Old Testament figure like Isaiah, or Jeremiah speaking the Word of God to people living under the threat of foreign invasion. Perhaps someone like John the Baptist, complete with camel hair coat, leather belt and a locust diet preaching in the desert. Or maybe you think of a contemporary Christian in a Pentecostal church or the leader of a cult giving people a ‘word from the Lord’ received by direct personal revelation from God. “I have a Word from the Lord - go and buy that Harley Davidson bike (you deserve it)!”.

This sermon aims to present a very different picture of the modern-day prophet. A person who readily speaks God’s Word to others as they go about their daily lives e.g.

* In the car as they talk to their children
* After church as they discuss the sermon
* Over the back fence with a neighbour
* During a coffee with a friend when they read the Bible and talk about what’s in there
* When they share an article on social media about an aspect of their faith in Christ

As you hear this message those who were in the afternoon service two weeks ago will likely start to think on the 2nd and 3rd points ‘haven’t I heard this before?’ The answer is ‘yes’! It’s almost identical! Just remodelled under different headings. Why? Because a number who heard it recommended that we have it again in a morning service so that the whole congregation can hear. A seminary professor once said, “If it isn't good enough to preach twice then it's not good enough to preach once."

So this morning we have three points in the form of questions as follows:

1. Who are the prophets?
2. What is their message?
3. How might it sound?
4. **Who are the prophets?**

I met a man this week for the first time and spoke with him outside whilst his daughter patiently waited in his truck. We had a relatively short conversation in which I asked him about himself, his family and what was going on in his life. In passing he told me his daughter’s name: Talia and he said that she was 10 years old. As he got back into his truck, I spoke to Talia saying, “You must be Talia and you’re 10 years old!”. Her eyes widened with an expression like “how did you know that!” I said ‘Oh, I’m not a prophet, your dad just told me your name and how old you are few minutes ago!’

We tend to think of prophets in the Bible as having special information that would otherwise not be known or speaking predictions about the future. In fact about 90% of what the Old Testament prophets said was re-telling – saying again – what God had previously said before. It was not new information. The other 10% is foretelling – speaking of events yet to occur or giving insight that others did not have.

The book of Joel is somewhat unusual in this respect; most of the prophesy is future-focused. Much deals with the coming judgement of God. In the midst of words about the coming Day of the Lord, there is a call to repentance, to return to the Lord, to be glad and to rejoice in Him.

We can also see the following from our text:

a) God’s Spirit would be ‘poured out’.

* + The Spirit is the one of the three persons of the Triune God.
	+ He moved at the Creation to bring order from chaos (Gen 1:2).
	+ He empowered select individuals at various times e.g. Samson to kill a lion with his bare hands (Jude 14:6), Bezalel with skill in every kind of craft (Ex 35:31)

b) God’s Spirit would be given liberally, not just so some people, but to ‘all flesh’

* It’s clear from what follows that this does **not** mean every single person on the planet.
* Here is the qualification ‘your sons and your daughters, your old men, your young men’.
* The pronoun ‘your’ refers to the people of Israel: God’s chosen nation.
* However, whilst this outpouring is limited to God’s people, it includes every single one of them, men and women, old and young, whatever the social status.

So this outpouring of God’s Spirit would be lavish and extensive. Interpreting when this would occur and exactly what it would look like is not possible from Joel’s inspired words, but later events in history make this clear.

On the first day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, the Apostle Peter quotes Joel’s words to explain the coming of the Holy Spirit in power upon all kinds of devout Jews from ‘*every nation under heaven’.* Through this supernatural fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy, God created a nation of prophets who would go out into all the world and pronounce God’s Word, as all true prophets do.

With the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, God’s revelation through his prophets radically changed. No longer were prophets a select few who received ‘a word from the Lord’ either through direct speech, visions or dreams. Now every single one of God’s people were equipped with the Spirit to be prophets so that they could speak God’s words. This was true 2,000 years ago and it is still true today! This means, brothers and sisters, that we are all prophets! We are all called to be involved in the ministry of the Word!

Who is to equip us in this prophetic task? That would be me (The minister) together with the elders! We heard about this earlier from Eph 4:11: “*Christ gave…. pastors and teachers,to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*.”

What is the work of ministry? First and foremost it is a proclamation, a speaking out of the Word of God. We see this in Eph 4:15: “*Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*”. The idea is **not** that every person in the congregation spends some time up here in the pulpit! As author Peter White has aptly said “*we are not expecting the development of mini-ministers but of maxi-Christians*”. Being equipped for the ministry of the Word means being able to communicate God’s Word openly, for example, when we are

* In the car as they talk to our children
* After church as we discuss the sermon
* Over the back fence with a neighbour
* During a coffee with a friend when we read the Bible and talk about what’s in there
* When they share an article on social media about an aspect of their faith in Christ
* When we serve in the church e.g. as a deacon, in the kitchen, as a cleaner, or playing a musical instrument.

We can best do this by working alongside someone else with whom we can speak the words of God. What then are we to speak about with our mouths? That’s the question we now consider in the second point:

1. **What is their message?**

Sometimes on a Monday as I start to look at a passage of Scripture which I intend to preach on the following Sunday, I ask myself the question: “what am I going to say about that? I don’t know if I’ll have enough to fill 20 minutes’. You know what? A few days later I’m usually struggling to see how I can fit everything into 40 minutes! The Word of God is like that!

What did those upon whom the Holy Spirit was poured out speak about? We read in Acts 2:11 that they were ‘*telling in different languages the mighty works of God’.* They were speaking about what God had done.

Now that Christ has come and the Bible is complete, there is change in the content ratio for God’s prophets: From approx... 90% retelling and 10% foretelling what was not previously known TO 100% retelling what God has done and said – which of course includes the prophesies in the Bible which are yet to be fulfilled – like the return of Christ, the Day of Judgement, and the New Heavens and New Earth.

How can we tell the mighty works of God to others when there are so many of them in the Bible? American Author Stephen Covey has famously said that “*The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing*”. In order to link all the different events, characters and teachings of Scripture into the main purpose of this written revelation from God, we must know what the ‘main thing’ is in the Bible.

The Word of God point us to this in various places e.g. Heb 1:1-3 **“***Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*”.

The whole Bible is asingle interwoven narrative which points to Jesus Christ, the Image of the invisible God in perfect man, the Saviour of the world. The Gospel writer Luke records Jesus teaching the Word of God to Cleopas and his companion: **“***And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*” (Luke 24:27). We are not told which texts Jesus exegetes/explains to the men on that road to Emmaus when he said that: “*everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled*" (Luke 24:44).

Jesus refers to ‘Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms’ – these are the three Hebrew divisions of the Old Testament. They designated the entire revealed Scripture at that time. Jesus is saying that **every part** of God’s Word speaks of Him. He then “*opened their minds to understand the Scriptures*” (Luke 24:45).

Today, we have more of God’s written, special, revelation than was available to those two men who were walking to Emmaus. We have another 27 books of the Bible – the New Testament. Part of our task as willing followers of Jesus Christ, who desire “to make and equip disciples of Jesus, our Saviour, who joyfully serve and glorify God”, is to tell the story of the Bible so that, by God’s enabling grace, the minds of other people may be opened to understand the Scriptures.

It’s helpful to view the unfolding work of God through history in four stages: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

**The first stage of God’s unfolding story, Creation, only occupies 2 chapters in the book of Genesis, although it is referred to in many later Scriptures (e.g. Ex:8-11; Matt 19:4; Acts 17:26; Rom 5:12-20; 1 Cor 11:8; Heb 11:3). God designed this world so that human beings could flourish, living in the joy, peace and presence of their loving Maker, worshipping Him by loving him and one another forever.**

**The second stage of God’s unfolding story only occupies one chapter in the book of Genesis (3), but the effect of the ‘Fall’ permeates the whole Bible up to Revelation chapter 20. Just as** Adam and Eve rejected God's rule over them. So we too have done so through our attitudes and actions. Before we come to Christ, we have all declared ourselves to be God's enemies. This rebellion results in physical and spiritual death for us all, apart from Christ.

**The third stage of God’s unfolding story is Redemption:** God’s unfolding plan of rescuing lost people from the consequences of their rebellion through a Saviour is the main ‘storyline’ of the Bible.

**Complete Restoration of the whole world is the goal toward which God’s story is still moving.** The complete renewal of all things will take place in three ways:

a) Christ will return to judge sin and evil, and

b) He will usher in complete universal righteousness and peace forever

c) God will purge this world of evil once and for all.

The end of the Big Story of the Bible is **yet to occur**, this is what will take place: There will be *“...a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth ...(will) passed away, and the sea ..(will be) no more. And … the holy city, new Jerusalem... will come down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*” (from Rev 21:1)

The four-fold division: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration is one way to describe the Big Story of the Bible. One alternative is: Creation, Corruption, Catastrophe (the flood), Confusion (Babel), Christ, Cross, Consummation.

However we describe the Big Story, we need firstly to understand how the Bible fits together around the **central story** which God is telling and working out, we then need to put the pieces of Scripture together in order to prophesy – to tell that story to others in summary form. This can be done in many different ways, what follows in our last point is just one example of how we, as modern-day prophets, might speak the Word of God as we tell the Big Story of the Bible.

1. **How might it sound?**

In the beginning God created this universe – making this huge something which is all around us (and of which we ourselves are a part) out of nothing. God created galaxies, stars, planets, fish, birds and land animals. He made it very good. His greatest work of all was to create the first human beings: Adam and Eve in His image.

Our original common ancestors enjoyed a close relationship with their Creator. God gave them responsibility to care for the beautiful environment in which He had placed them. He instructed them to reproduce and have children and thereby to populate the earth.

God had also created angels in the beginning and one of these, Satan, rebelled against God and took on the form of a serpent. He tempted Eve to disobey God by eating fruit from a tree which God had told her to eat. Adam followed her by also eating this forbidden fruit and thereby also rebelling against God. The Bible calls this disobedience against God sin. Sin results in spiritual death – a break in the relationship between the sinner and God. Sin also results in physical death – the fate of all human beings since Adam and Eve rebelled against God.

This ‘fall’ of mankind has resulted in all humans being conceived not as Adam and Eve were first created morally good, but with an evil inclination to disobey God’s authority. Just after Adam and Eve sinned, God made the first gospel (good news) promise in the Bible, saying to Satan: “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspringand her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel*." (Gen 3:15) A descendant of the woman was going to be born who would be wounded by Satan, but He would triumph over the Devil. This promise points to the person and work of Jesus Christ who would come to solve the problem of sin for a people God has chosen to be His own.

Adam and Eve’s sin had consequences for their own family. One of their sons, Cain, murdered his brother. Several generations later, the world was so full of violence and rebellion against God that only one man was morally upright. His name was Noah.

God instructed Noah to build a very large boat to rescue himself, his wife and their three sons and their wives, together with pairs of every kind of creature from the great flood which He would send in judgement on the whole earth. God’s deliverance of Noah and His family from the flood points forward to His rescue of many people through faith in Jesus Christ.

One of Noah’s descendants, Abraham, was called by God to move from his home to a land that God would show Him. God promised that He would make a great nation from Abraham’s descendants and that through this nation, all the other people groups of the world would be blessed. Abraham had a son called Isaac, who had a son called Jacob whose eleventh child, Joseph becoming a ruler of Egypt under Pharaoh. 400 years later, the descendants of Abraham had grown into a very large people group who were enslaved by the Egyptian pharaoh at that time.

God then raised up a prophet called Moses to lead the people out of Egypt and to bring them back to the land promised to Abraham. God gave Moses the 10 commandments, which were the basis of his agreement with them to be their God and for them to be His people. God’s deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt points forward to His rescue of many people from the bondage of their rebellion against God through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who would take away sin. In addition to His moral law, God also gave them ceremonial laws which were to teach them the need for sin to be dealt with through the shedding of the blood of a spotless sacrifice.

Despite His goodness and unmerited favour towards the Israelites, they repeatedly turned away from Him down through the generations. The Old Testament records this repeated disobedience of Israel as the people often failed to trust in God. God therefore sent many prophets to remind them of what He had promised and to warn them of the consequences of their rebellion, and to foretell the coming of the Deliverer (Messiah – ‘Anointed One’) who would come and finally deal with the problem of sin (rebellion against God) and its’ inevitable consequence, death.

The prophets spoke of Jesus Christ promising that all who believe in Him receive forgiveness of sins through His name (Acts 10:43). At just the right time, about 2,000 years ago, God sent His own Son Jesus to be born of a woman in fulfilment of the words He had spoken to Satan thousands of years before.

Jesus always lived willingly under God’s authority, being tempted to sin as we all are, but never rebelling against His Heavenly Father. He began His public ministry at the age of about 30, demonstrating His divine power through many supernatural miracles. He healed many sick people and explained that the reason He had come to earth was to ‘seek and to save the lost’ (Luke 19:10) – people who were separated from God.

In Jerusalem, Jesus was betrayed by one of His disciples called Judas Iscariot. He was then unjustly condemned by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate to a slow and very painful death by crucifixion.

When Jesus died there was a great earthquake and the curtain in the temple which separated the inner sanctuary from the outer areas was supernaturally torn from top to bottom. This indicated that Jesus had restored direct access to God for all those people he laid down his life for.

The body of Jesus was laid in a tomb and on the third day after his death He was raised to new life by God and appeared to many people before ascending bodily into the clouds.

Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of all the promises of God, the OT sacrificial system, tabernacle and temple. He is the Great High Priest of God, the King of Kings and the Saviour of the World. He is coming back to this earth - at which time He will judge all people, those living at that time and all who have died.

Those **who have trusted in Him**, believing that He took their place and received the judgement of God on their behalf against their sin will gain entry into the new earth which God will make and populate with all His people in a perpetual paradise where there will be no pain, suffering, decay or death.

**Those who have not trusted** in Jesus will be separated from God forever. They will be utterly miserable, knowing that Jesus truly is the King who reigns forever, but that they are forever shut out of the glorious paradise over which He lovingly rules.

Jesus came to this earth to “*to set us completely free and to make us right with God*” (words of HCLD6QA18). One of the Old Testament prophets, Joel predicted a time when: “*And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved*” (Joel 2:32)

Calling on the name of the Lord means believing that Jesus died in your place for your rebellion against God and being saved means that you can then have a relationship with God, that He is your good heavenly father and that his right judgement will not fall on you, but that you will live forever in paradise.

Will you believe in Him? Coming to Him and admitting your rebellion against God, your breaking of His good law, and trusting in Him to rescue you and bring you safely to a perfect home with Him which will last forever?

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Brothers and sisters in Christ, are you persuaded each one of you, that you are called to a word ministry? You are called to be a prophet. We are all called to retell the Big Story about Jesus as revealed in the Bible. You are called to do this in your own words to those around you - just like those spirit-filled believers on the Day of Pentecost. We are all called to tell in our own language(s) the mighty works of God. Christ is sending us out from this place to be His willing army of true prophets. His will for all of us is to be ‘maxi-Christians’.

He says: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*." (Matt 28:18-20)

Have you heard his voice? Will you obey his words?

AMEN