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## Sermon

### ***“Words of Knowledge”***

**2 Kings 6:9-12; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 4:4-19,28**

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Years ago, I was practising the organ rather ineptly in church, when I heard the sound of weeping. It seemed unlikely that it was an emotional response (good or bad) to my playing. I walked back and found a stranger weeping in church. We got talking and I offered to pray for her. The thought, “abortion,” appeared in my mind. I tried several times to brush it aside and to concentrate on praying for her, until with mounting dismay I realised this might be a piece of information God wanted me to use. I tentatively asked if the word meant anything to her. She looked amazed and asked how I knew. The upshot was she was able to confess her guilt and distress over a past abortion. Some years later, I meet her again by the grace of God, and learnt she had become a Christian.

After we returned from overseas last year, in the following weeks we had rather a rush of Words of Knowledge. I realized I need to provide some teaching on the subject to help people know what I understand to be happening. I have previously taught on the subject of spiritual gifts more than once here, but maybe it didn't have the same relevance then!

The change in December was because I had just found that God would use me in that way. It was not a new principle to me at all. However, I previously thought the Lord had not equipped me to use that gift in that way. So having found that he would, I took the brakes off as it were and we had something of a gusher!

The name, “Word of Knowledge” comes directly from 1 Corinthians 12:8.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. <sup>8</sup> To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

The Greek refers to a *logos* of knowledge. Logos means word and is so translated in older versions, which is where the common usage sprang from. It is argued that in this context, “message” would be a better choice of word: a Message of Knowledge – as rendered by the NIV.

The Word or Message of Knowledge is one of nine spiritual gifts which Paul lists here. He says these are given by the Holy Spirit as he determines. They are manifestations of the Spirit. A manifestation is when something becomes evident, is made known, or revealed. So when these gifts are used they show that the Holy Spirit is present and at work.

When someone speaks the secrets of your heart, you know God has just revealed his knowledge of you back to you, because the speaker could not have known those things. When a miracle occurs and you have restored movement where a joint was previously too painful or restricted to allow movement, you know the Holy Spirit is at work.

## **Don't be afraid!**

The great thing with this gift is it is either right or wrong. The information is true or false. Its purpose is to give necessary information, or identify someone God wants to help. For example, Joan had had chronic pain for five years after a bad neck manipulation. She had not thought of having prayer for it. When the word was given in a service, she believed it was for her, asked for prayer and it was immediately healed. God used the gift to prompt her to ask for prayer so it could be healed.

If the information is wrong you can just ignore it. Put it down to a mistake on the speaker's part. Let's have grace with each other. Paul says, “For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.”<sup>2</sup> We will not always get it right, otherwise there would be perfection. However, we can also grow in experience of using a gift and in confidence that God will use us. Paul instructed Timothy to “fan into flame the gift in him.”<sup>3</sup> He also told him to “Practise these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress.”<sup>4</sup> The last of these duties was not to neglect the gift (*charisma*) which was given to him through prophecy when the elders laid hands on him. So Timothy had to be encouraged to use his gift. We also need to stir up and not neglect whatever gifts we are entrusted with. It is good that others can see progress. So that means there will be improvement. We are co-workers with God not puppets.

It is not a directive gift, it is informational. Now of course it could be misused but in that case, back off from the person who is out of order and excuse yourself.

## **Is there a risk of deception?**

Yes there is. Paul makes it clear at the beginning of the chapter that before they were Christians they were led astray by idols. So he gives a test of the willingness to confess the Lordship of Christ. There are counterfeits from the other kingdom. The occult world likes to copy God's good gifts with distorted versions which lead people away from God. The occult equivalent to the Word of Knowledge is a psychic. The question is where is the information coming from? Is it from the Holy Spirit or from an evil spirit. So yes, we should be careful especially when we don't know the beliefs and practices of the individual offering information. As with any of the spiritual gifts we are responsible to test what happens ourselves. Is the person using the gift submitted to Jesus? Is what is being done consistent with Scripture? Is there manipulation and control?

## **Nature of the Gift**

I have researched the writings of various commentators (Thistleton, Fee and Gudem) on this passage. The most significant fact is that Paul gives brief titles for these gifts assuming the reader knows what they are.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:9-10

<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim 1:6

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 4:15 (RSV)

The only other comment he makes about the Word of Knowledge is that the gift is imperfect and will pass away when the perfect comes.<sup>5</sup>

A lot of what people say about the gift is then their own presupposition. It is clear from the context that the nine gifts listed are supernatural empowerments by the Holy Spirit. They are given by him and done in him. There is some debate as to whether the gift is different from what Pentecostals and Charismatics have thought it to be through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. But these scholars don't suggest that the receiving of inspired information for another is invalid just that it might better be classified under "Prophecy" or "Revelation."

Another approach to understand this area is look at the record of Scripture and see if such a gift is used. We find multiple examples.

- In the Gospel reading, Jesus appears to use this gift as he talks with the Samaritan woman. He knows how many husbands she has had and her current cohabitation.
- Jesus tells Peter that he will catch a fish with a coin in its mouth to pay the temple tax.<sup>6</sup>
- He sends two disciples to prepare the room for the Passover Feast and gives them detailed instructions about meeting a man carrying a jar of water (unusual for it to be a man). They should follow him to the house and arrange to use the room there.<sup>7</sup>
- In the Old Testament passage, Elisha knows the military plans of the king of Aram and is able to warn the King of Israel.<sup>8</sup>
- Samuel told Saul that the lost donkeys have been found.<sup>9</sup>
- Elisha supernaturally knows that his servant defrauded Naaman by claiming a prize for the healing for himself.<sup>10</sup>
- When the rich woman who hosted him lost her son and sent the servant for help, Elisha didn't know what the problem was. But apparently he expected that he would have known for he said, "...the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why."<sup>11</sup>

In the New Testament with the early disciples, we find:

- Peter knows that Ananias and Sapphira have conspired to lie to God and the church about their giving.<sup>12</sup>
- A different Ananias is instructed by God, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."<sup>13</sup> He obeys and leads Saul the Pharisee to Christ.
- Later again, God spoke to Peter and told him about a meeting he was about to have with some gentiles and that he should go with them. Meanwhile the Centurion had an angelic visitation which told him to send for Peter to speak to him. God was setting up the first conversion of the gentiles.

## A recent example

Last week, I needed to call Telecom faults and reached an operator in a call-centre presumably in America. She put me on hold while she sought advice on my telephone problem. As I waited, I had the thought that I could pray for her. I asked, "Father, what do you want me to do?" The thought came, "Tell her I love her." That seemed a bit general and unconvincing so I said, "Is there anything more specific?" Soon afterwards, I had the clear thought in my head, "Ingrown toenail." I hadn't tried to make it up; the thought was just there. I pursued the matter further and asked which toe. An visual impression of two feet came to mind

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor 13:8-10

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 17:27

<sup>7</sup> Mark 14:13-16

<sup>8</sup> 2 Kings 6:12

<sup>9</sup> 1 Samuel 9:20

<sup>10</sup> 2 Kings 5:26

<sup>11</sup> 2 Kings 4:27

<sup>12</sup> Acts 5:3

<sup>13</sup> Acts 9:11-12

and my attention was drawn to the right foot and the second toe. Of course, I now was scared of making a fool of myself, scared of being wrong, offending her etc, etc. However, when she finished dealing with the fault, I gently offered the idea.

She said, "Yes."

I said, "Do you mean you do have an ingrown toenail?"

"Yes."

"And is it the second toe on your right foot?"

"Yes."

"Wow! May I pray for you?"

"Okay."

So I commanded the pain to go, the toe to be healed and the cause of the problem to be corrected. I did not feel I could push things as far as asking her to report back because I knew that operators are timed on their calls and this would be extending her completion time. However, I trust this both helped her with the pain and more importantly to realize that God is real and interested in her.

## Recent Fruit

The fruit of the Words of Knowledge brought in December was about a three-fold increase in people coming forward for prayer. Both Anne and I contributed messages. I am only going to speak of mine merely because I kept track of them.

In that time, I contributed six words<sup>14</sup> and I happened to hear of people responding to five of those. I don't know whether the sixth word was mistaken or just that I didn't hear of a response. Of those five, I know of immediate improvement in three of them and a full healing for Julie's eye as she has testified. I don't know the outcome of the fifth case. On the first week, Joan responded to a message Anne brought and was immediately fully healed of her neck pain. I was also told that several people chose to attend Healing Rooms the following Tuesday because of the encouragement they had received to seek help.

I hope that overview may help any who were puzzled by what was happening or even offended. I apologise for any clumsiness of dealing with it. Trying to allow "the blowing where it wills" of the Spirit into a structured setting can be difficult. But we need to consider which is more important and Who has priority? Whose church is it anyway?

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<sup>14</sup> Left knee, left ankle, right eye, right ear, left elbow, [mouth ulcer].