

I will pour out my spirit on all people

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[0 : 00] And Joel chapter 2 and verse 28. And afterward, I will pour out my spirit in all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. These words Joel is describing for us, the last days as the New Testament describes them.

The age of God's church, which lies after the resurrection of Christ and the coming of God's spirit at Pentecost.

He brings before us three great things. First, that God's spirit comes on all flesh and all people.

Not only on Jews, but also on Gentile believers. Again, that God's spirit comes on every member of the church of Jesus Christ.

[1 : 07] Not only on some specially gifted individuals. Not only on those called to some special office. But on every single member of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then thirdly, that as a result of this, all of God's people become prophets.

And so he says to us that the spirit comes on Gentile as well as Jew. The spirit comes on every single child of God.

Every single child of God is therefore a prophet. I want to focus tonight on the last of those poems, this emphasis that all God's children are prophets.

And I do so against the background of a very high profile modern discussion. The claim that in the renewed and restored church of the 20th century, God has given us again a new office of prophets.

[2 : 32] Man specially gifted. Man with special authority. All of us have heard such claims. Many of us, I suppose, are confused by such claims.

And so I turn to Joel and his teaching here that in the last days all of the Lord's people are prophets.

I want to cover it so rather indirectly. And I want to ask first of all what was the prophet in the Old Testament.

I suppose that the common answer to that is that the prophet was somebody who was able to foretell the future. And in some ways that's true.

Because in the Old Testament the great prophets often did foretell events. They foretold that Christ will be born at Bethlehem.

[3 : 46] Born of a virgin. Raised from the dead. They foretold the exit in Babylon. They foretold the return from that exile in Babylon.

We do find time and again that God's prophets did foreknow and did foretell the future. But we should always bear in mind one great fact at this point.

Namely that the outstanding Old Testament prophet was Moses. the greatest of all the prophets.

And if you turn to the works of Moses there is in them little by way of prediction. Moses very seldom foretold the future.

Instead Moses performed his office by coming to the people of God with a great body of law. A great body of teaching.

[4 : 59] A great body of moral directions. Sometimes great criticism of the people of God.

Not often prediction but substantially coming to the church of God with the mind of God himself. In fact if you turn to the great prophets you might very well conclude that above all they spoke God's judgment on his own church.

They were the great critics of the people of God. They spoke often God's word of condemnation. And if we turn to Moses if we cannot say that the prophets were essentially and primarily foretellers then what were they?

They were men who stood in the very presence of God who had an audience with God and to whom God told his own secret.

God revealed to them their mystery. Things you couldn't deduce from first principles. Things you couldn't know by natural sagacity because they referred to God's own purpose to God's own discretion.

[6 : 40] Other prophets knew because face to face with God in God's own audience chamber God told them his own secrets.

God told them of the advent of Messiah. God told them of the sufferings of Christ. God told them of the glory that should follow.

Things that man could never know and never deduce. it wasn't a matter of man's own interpretation. It was a matter of God revealing his mind to them.

The Lord gave those that feared them his own secret. He shared with them the mystery of his own innermost redemptive intention.

But it wasn't only that. It wasn't only that God gave them his own secrets. that God made them the spokesmen of his own mind.

[7 : 43] God told them to go forth and divulge, disclose, proclaim what was in the depths of God's own heart. And so they became the spokesmen for the deity.

And they spoke those words with divine authority. In fact they were the very mouth of God. Just as Aaron was God's spokesman, was Moses' spokesman, so the prophets were the spokesmen of God himself.

They knew God's secret. And they proclaimed God's secret. And they proclaimed that secret in words that God himself gave them.

They spoke with divine authority. In words that men understood. But also in words that were the very words of God.

They were carried by the Holy Spirit as they spoke. They spoke as men under divine inspiration. Now of course there was a very wide range of prophets.

[8 : 59] There were great prophets like Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Prophets who wrote great books. And there were minor prophets who also wrote great books.

And there were some even more minor prophets who left nothing on record. Who's teaching us no part of our Christian canon.

And yet in essence the office was always the same. those two things were always true. They knew God's secret and they were God's spokesmen.

They had a revelation from God and they spoke it forth in words that God himself gave. And then we ask why do we have such prophets today?

prophets today? But do we have such prophets today? Do we have today men who stand in the audience chamber of God to whom God reveals the innermost mystery of redemption and whom God commissions to be his own spokesman and whose mouth God fills with his own words?

[10 : 33] Men whose words are canonical, men whose writings are authoritative because they express in inspired words the disclosures of revelation?

Do we have men whom God continues to tell his secret and whom God commissions as his own spokesman?

Well, to that question I answer no. In fact, even those who today claim that there are still prophets in the church of God will hiss and on at once to say, but of course, not that kind of prophet, not the Old Testament kind of prophet, but some other kind of prophet.

We no longer have those who stand in God's orange chamber, those to whom God speaks forth his own secrets, those whom God commissions as his own spokesman.

And why can I say that? Well, I can say, I think, for one great reason. That is this, that God's secret is now right out in the open.

[11 : 56] God's mystery is revealed. The innermost contents of God's heart are disclosed. In a way, there is nothing more to say.

There is nothing more for men to tell, because in the last days, the last great word has been spoken, and God's mystery is fully and utterly known.

The mystery of Godhead. Paul spoke of it in those terms, great is the mystery of godliness, or the mystery of Godhead, God manifest in the flesh.

And there it is, right out in the open. The mystery of the ingathering of the Gentiles, again, one of God's great secrets, that too is right out in the open.

That the Gentiles are fellow heirs in the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is right out in the open. The mystery of that great union between Christ and his church, they shall be one flesh.

[13 : 11] This is a great mystery. I speak of Christ and the church. Prophecy is about the secret of God.

It's about God coming in the flesh. It's about the ingathering of the Gentiles. It's about this great transformational union between Christ and his people.

If we go to the last of the great Old Testament prophets, for example, Anna in Luke chapter 2, she knew the secret. She sees the child Jesus in the temple and she knows at once who he is and she tells everybody she knows God's secret.

Take John the Baptist. He knows God's secret. Behold the Lamb of God that bears the sin of the world.

In the Christian age, after Anna and John, it is right out. There is no more to tell. There are no more secrets.

[14 : 25] There is no more mystery because it is all in Christ. Christ is the secret. Christ is the mystery of God and in him all is revealed and all is disclosed.

And so I'm saying that today now that this mystery is right out in the open, now that it's fully known, this great secret of God, now that it's fully known, we no longer need that man should come and say to us we have God's secret because it's right out there the mystery is fully revealed.

Well, what then? Today, as we face the challenges of our own situation, as Church of God, us individuals, where do we turn for guidance?

if there are no prophets in this great specialized sense, is that not some impoverishment of the life of the Church?

Is it not some mutilation compared to the Old Testament situation? What are our resources as we today seek to know God's will and seek God's guidance for ourselves?

[15 : 48] What do we have? Well, first of all, we have this. We have the living Word of God in the Bible. The living Word of God.

The great prophets are dead. The apostles are dead. And yet, being dead, they speak to us. And being dead, they minister to us.

We have their Word, which is God's Word. we have it here in written and accessible form in this great book.

We have it here in God's providence in a language we can understand. We have it in language, in concepts which are lucid, accessible to us.

You know, the reformers kept on saying to the Church, you'll find this in your old confession. Remember, this is the people's book. It is not the book of specialists.

[16 : 55] It's not the book of scholars. It's not the book of professional theologians. It's the book of the people of God.

They must have it in their own language. and they the unlearned and I say again the unlearned in the Jew use of ordinary means.

They can understand this word for themselves. They can grasp its message. They can discern its meaning. They can see its force.

It's the book in which God still speaks in which God still speaks to us lucidly. And in this book there is the whole counsel of God.

All that we need to know if we are to glorify God. All we must know to have faith in Christ. All we must know to live the Christian life.

[17 : 59] It is absolutely all here. The whole counsel of God in God's own proportions in God's own balance.

It is there as God thinks we need it. There is nothing lacking. There is no defect. There is nothing we need to know that isn't there.

And so first of all as we seek God with ourselves we have this fact the living word of God in the Bible. this word which is accessible to God's people which is perspicuous to God's people which is sufficient for God's people and which God's spirit leads them to understand we have it there.

We are a people of the book. We have God's word to guide us. But then again we also have this. We have men specially called to expound God's word for us.

Men whom God has given particular gifts. The gift of understanding God's word. Of explaining God's word.

[19 : 20] Of applying God's word to the contemporary situation. Now these men don't come with fresh revelations. They haven't been in God's audience chamber.

They have no more mysteries to disclose or secrets of God to reveal. And yet their word too was the word of God.

It is the word of God derivatively. It is the word of God in so far as it's faithful to holy scripture. It does not have the originality of the prophetic message.

It has only the authority that belongs to God's revelation given to us first of all in and through those prophets themselves.

But so long as a man stands before us loyally and faithfully expounding scripture then that man is speaking the word of God because the meaning of scripture is scripture.

[20 : 37] The message which is authentically biblical is itself the word of God. That man must know its meaning but he must also know its significance what it's saying to us in our own time how it speaks to the weak how it speaks to the feeble minded how it speaks to those who are unruly how it speaks to those who lack assurance how it speaks to the world of culture of politics to the whole life of the church of God and I say again this man has no fresh revelation he has no new secrets but he's expounding the word that God has given us for our direction and again we have this we have the light of nature and Christian prudence

I take that phrase again from our own confession of faith we have the light of nature and Christian prudence what do I mean well I mean this that as we today face up to our own problems our own challenges as we ask ourselves how do we respond to the Islamic challenge on our doorsteps as we ask ourselves where can we find new mission fields find appropriate missionaries find for the church of God some kind of strategy as we ask those questions where do we find our guidance as on the personal level we ask should we change our jobs should we change our residence us how should we exercise our gifts we find that often so perplexing and it would in many ways be so convenient if there was some prophet to tell us what to do or if there was some encyclical to give us some kind of infallible guidance but we don't have these things we face the challenges we have the word of

God we have Christian teachers we have our own Christian prudence and Christians seem to find this so terribly difficult it would be so marvelous as some prophet would tell the church where to plant its new missions how to raise more finance tell us what to do with our gifts but God said you have your own Christian prudence in other words you must look at the Bible's general principles you must use your own experience you must consult with friends and having done so you must ask what will glorify God what will edify the church of God what will contribute most effectively to the furtherance of the gospel

Christian prudence we have to think we have to use our minds now I say again it isn't simply prudence it is Christian prudence it is a mind indwelt by the spirit of God the spirit indwelling your thinking and as we think through the issues depending on God's spirit and praying for his guidance then by God's grace we come to God's own answer but there is no other way there is no access to a special revelation there is no access to some infallible teacher we have God's word we have Christian teaching we have our own Christian prudence but then we also have this we have this great fact that all of the

Lord's people are prophets every single one of them I will pour out my spirit in all people your sons and daughters will prophesy your old men will dream dreams your young men will see visions even on my servants both men and women I'll pour out my spirit in those days that's what the Lord says remember Moses longing would that all the Lord's people were prophets in the age of the spirit that longing is fulfilled we have no classical prophecy we don't in my view have any particular figures who are prophets in any specialised sense but we have this great reality that all of the Lord's people are prophets can I build this up slowly

[26 : 17] I believe that just as the Lord Jesus Christ himself performs the three offices of prophet priest and king so every believer is prophet priest and king we're all priests who bring your own sacrifices to God our bodies in reasonable service we are all kings who are more than conquerors through him that loved us and who one day will reign with Christ and we are all prophets and that means three things it means that in this age of the spirit every one of God's children knows the secret that fact is so familiar to us that we really have little consciousness of its false we don't realise just how amazing it is the

Lord said that John the Baptist was the greatest of all those born of women the outstanding the foremost Old Testament prophet and here he said he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist in the New Testament the youngest and humblest believer knows the mystery knows God's secret God's great secret better than John the Baptist we know more of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that followed than Isaiah did or David did or any Old Testament prophet that's an amazing thing our children they have a knowledge of the incarnation the enfleshment of

God God in human nature they know that on that cross Christ bore our sins they know that because of the incarnation God understands our experiences God knows our pain they know the resurrection of Christ and the sovereignty of Christ the outpouring of God's spirit they know the secret they know the mystery John the Baptist groped and struggled he said behold the Lamb of God and then he said art thou the coming one or should we look for another but here we are in the age of the spirit and we all know we have the mystery we have God's great secret we know the truth it's revealed to us we grasp this thing that lay for so long hidden in the heart of God it's all out and we know it as God's children all believers know

God's secret know God's mystery and secondly all believers are God's spokesmen every single one of them just because they know the mystery because they know the secret they are God's spokesmen that's made so plain for us in the New Testament hold fast your confession this magnificent teaching you see we have a great high priest you know that you know sometimes in Acts the amazing thing is that the young convert at the very moment of conversion prophesied not a month or a year afterwards but you see Ephesus in Acts 19 those new Ephesian believers they spoke in tongues and prophesied the very moment of conversion there was a great high priest we know you know that he's God's son you know he's passed through the heavens you know he's touched with a feeling of your infirmities he's great and that's your confession your testimony you know it's very embarrassing often to be asked for your testimony because people say mean by that tell us about yourself and that's not a testimony our testimony is we have a great high priest

Christ is great that's the that's the confession you hold it fast give to those who ask of you a reason for the hope that's in you explain to the world what your hope is explain to the world why you entertain such a hope tell them let them know why you expect after death to be in the glory which God's son had with the father before the world was why do you have that hope what is your hope why do you hold that hope hold forth the word of life you are the light of the world you are to proclaim the wonderful works of God the works of the wonder of God what a great God he is great God of wonders all thy ways are much less godlike and divine so we know God's secret and we're all God's spokesmen every single member of the body my spirit poured out on all flesh and I do want to insist on this on your sons and daughters it isn't a matter of maturity in fact in some ways the youngest connerly makes the best profit because it's all so fresh to her it's all so new they were filled with the spirit and they spoke in tongues and they prophesied they spoke forth a newfound sense of the love of

[32 : 39] God and they were full of it and so I'm saying we all know God's secret and we're all God's spokesmen and we are all endowed for that task we have all been given the gift and all been given the capacity and the aptitude for this great responsibility I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh you go back again to the book of Acts and the great promise made there to God's children you shall receive power and you shall be witnesses to me and that power came when at Pentecost this great promise of Joel's was fulfilled and the spirit came as a rushing mighty wind in clove and fire like tongues and they spoke in every language of the world they spoke for the glory of God the magnificence of God they had the power of course they would themselves say like Moses said

I can't speak I am a child and God says but I've taken care of that I've given you my spirit even says to us take no thought what you're going to say don't rehearse it beforehand don't be anxious and uptight and worried about it because when the challenge comes my spirit will guide you when men ask you ask you why you hope as you do when they ask you what your hope is then trust God to tell you what to say to give you the words that you need in this particular situation of course we need more than words to witness we need love for the other person we need wisdom we need tact we need courage as well as needing words but the whole point is my spirit the spirit of prophecy lying in every single child of God so that by the aid of

God's spirit you understand God's mystery and by the aid of God's spirit you can speak for God be God's spokesman and you can never never say Lord I can't you can never say you don't have the ability because he says I will pour out my spirit upon you remember those believers again in Acts after Stephen's martyrdom ordinary men and women they went everywhere you see speaking and gossiping the word of God we don't know their names they left no books they didn't function as great classical prophets but everywhere they went they spoke the word of God I'm sure they didn't do it to their old satisfaction didn't do it consistently didn't do it eloquently but somehow it was done very very effectively today today there is so much despair about God's church its decline its contraction and yet if you and I were prepared to accept the truth about ourselves that we're all

God's prophets all God's authorized spokesmen what potential is still left in the church of God I'm not saying to you tonight the age of prophets is past what I'm saying to you is the exact opposite of that I'm saying to you that the age of prophets is here as it was never here before when all God's people know God's secret when all of God's people have God's words when all of God's people are richly endowed with God's spirit where the potential of the church of God is limitless if only we understood ourselves you don't need anybody sanctioned to prophesy the wonderful works of

God you need no one's permission you need no one's training in special techniques you simply need to know the secret you need to be filled with God's spirit you need God's words that's what we are all of us God's prophets it's an astonishing thing I say again to you you know more than I say under the same spirit that made him into such an incomparable writer and auditor and preacher that same spirit you know he fills you do you realize that the whole of the spirit of God is in you is every attribute that form in every aspect of his ministry it's all there and tonight we don't feel that feel so inadequate maybe well blessed are the poor in spirit and yet let's not be so poor that we forget what God has done for us you know

[38 : 47] God's secret you are filled with God's spirit you are God's authorized spokesman just as much as I am just as much as any other believer what do we need we need a living relationship with God come back time and time and time again to that great phrase of words was in a very different connection when he spoke of poetry the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings that's what we need to feel deeply what happened on the cross of Calvary to feel deeply this fact that God loved us loved us so ridiculously so extravagantly so absurdly put us before his own son and crucified his son in our place to feel that by God's grace and then to go forth and let those feelings overflow in the proclamation of the love of

God that's what we need you're God's prophet you walk yes you walk small because you're poor in spirit and you mourn and you're me you walk small but you know the devil sometimes keeps you small in the wrong way and I want you to walk tall and I want you to say I know more than I say I knew I know God's secret I'm God's spokesman I'm filled with God's spirit I have a tremendous privilege I have an awesome responsibility just because I know all these things oh well it's going to be that way what great thing it is that you speak for God that you bring your friends along to the place where God's word is a great thing let us bend your backs to that tusk then remember the great words of Cooper there is a fountain filled with blood thrown from

Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunge beneath this flood lose all their guilty stains and he continues and he tells us this e'er since my faith I saw the stream thy flowing wounds supply redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die then in a nobler sweeter song I'll sing thy power to save when this poor lisping stammering tongue lies silent in the grave Paul had a stammering tongue his speech was contemptible for that marvelous consolation that is and God's spirit came you see this poor little man his bodily presence was weak and God took him this man and God made him his own spokesman you say to me

Lord I lisp and I stammer because it's a poor poor tongue Lord and God wants it and God wants us lisping and stammering for himself because of course by comparison with the glory of redeeming love no words of others are of any value of any significance difference but you know that also means that the difference between man and man here is nothing compared to the difference between any human words and the reality gosh there's a great difference between my words and Isaiah's eloquence and mine great great difference and yet compared to the glory of the subject that difference is nothing so let's watch lest our humility become self deprecation and our mock humility become an excuse for silence and for paralysis

I want you all talking I want you all chattering I want you all lisping I want you all stammering I want you all saying redeeming love redeeming love redeeming love until those tongues are silent in the grave and then we'll speak it maybe more appropriately but the obligation is no less now than it will be then so let's be speaking let's realize we know the secret we are God's spokesmen we are God's spirit may it be so for his glory's sake let us pray