Text: I Corinthians 13:8-14:5
Title: "The Spirit Way … Prophet Sharing"

INTRODUCTION

Who is speaking truth into your life?

ILLUSTRATION – Gordon MacDonald tells the story of a time several years ago when he was on a speaking tour in Japan with a close personal friend. The friend was a number of years older than Gordon. As they walked down the street of a particular city in Japan, the name of a common friend came up, and Gordon said something unkind about that person … something sarcastic, cynical, a put-down. The older friend stopped, turned, and faced Gordon and with deep, slow words he said, "Gordon, a man who says he loves God would not say a thing like that about a friend."

> Gordon MacDonald said: "He could have put a knife into my ribs, and the pain would not have been any less. He did what a prophet does. But you know something? There have been ten thousand times in the last twenty years that I have been saved from making a jerk of myself. When I've been tempted to say something unkind about a brother or sister, I hear my friend's voice say, 'Gordon, a man who says he loves God would not speak in such a way about a friend.'"

That's what prophets do. They remind us of the truth and how we should live our lives in light of the truth. We all need people who constantly speak truth into our lives.

Open your Bibles to I Corinthians 14. I want us to talk today about the spiritual gift of prophecy. You may have never heard a sermon on the gift of prophecy, but we come today to I Corinthians 14 and we're going to deal with it. I want to talk to you about "Prophet Sharing." What happens when people with the gift of prophecy share that gift with us?

Now before we get into our text, it might be helpful for us to imagine what would go in a church gathering. I say "imagine" because the Scriptures are remarkably quiet about exactly how the worship services and church gatherings were conducted. We know that in some places they may have been modeled after the synagogue services, particularly since many of the first Christians converted from Judaism. So there would have been teaching, the reading of Scripture, prayer and singing, just as we have those elements in our worship today.

> Reading I Corinthians and other of the letters of the NT lets us know that there was also a very dynamic element to the gatherings. Spiritual gifts were exercised freely as the church members spoke to each other and ministered to each other as the Holy Spirit prompted them. And not just when they gathered on the Lord's Day, but throughout the week as they had the occasion to be together.

How they were organized, we don't know. But it's pretty evident that the there was a lot of truth being spoken into the lives of church members through the gifts of teaching, knowledge, wisdom, and, as we'll see here in I Corinthians 14, speaking in tongues and prophecy.

Here in I Corinthians 14, Paul talks about how the gift of prophecy is to function in the church, and why it is preferable to the gift of tongues. First, we'll talk about prophecy, then, next week, we'll talk about tongues.

What is prophecy? Prophecy is …

1. A <u>SPEAKING</u> GIFT (v.1)

1 Corinthians 14:1 (NIV) - Follow the way of love (this connects to I Corinthians 13) **and eagerly desire spiritual gifts** (the spiritual gifts are to function, being the Spirit's way of shaping the church to look minister like Jesus did)**, especially the gift of prophecy.**

The word "prophecy" comes from the combination of two words in the original language which means "to speak forth."

Prophecy is Spirit-inspired, Spirit-empowered intelligible speech. Speaking in tongues, as we'll see next week, is Spirit-empowered unintelligible speech.

Let me see if I can explain the issue of prophecy in these terms:

TWO KINDS OF PROPHECY IN THE BIBLE:

- **PREDICTION** – In the OT and the NT prophets spoke about events that would happen in the future. If they were a true prophet, God used them to prepare His people for future situations.

- **PROCLAMATION** – Most of the prophecy we see in the Bible is not so more foretelling as it is forth-telling. Proclaiming a message from God to His people.

FOUR KINDS OF PROPHETS IN THE BIBLE:

- **OT PROPHETS** (Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.)

  Their messages were often announced with "Thus says the Lord…"

  There are prophets in the OT whose predictions and proclamations were uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit so that their message became Scripture for us. There are two sections for prophets in the OT: major prophets (like Isaiah or Jeremiah) and minor prophets (like Habakkuk or Malachi).

  They spoke about immediate situations (national and international affairs, battles, etc.) They also spoke about distant situations involving the first and second coming of the Messiah and other details about His life and ministry.

- **NT CHURCH LEADERS**

  Acts 13:1 - In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers…

1 Corinthians 12:28 - And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers… Note: These were "offices" in the early church.

Ephesians 4:11 - It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

- **FALSE PROPHETS** – These false prophets were found in the OT and the NT.

  2 Peter 2:1 - But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.

  1 John 4:1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

  ILLUSTRATION – Mormon church leaders are called "prophets." They are false prophets. Mohammed is called the great prophet of Islam, but he was a false prophet.

- **CHURCH MEMBERS WITH THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF PROPHECY**

  Definition: Prophecy is the gift whereby a person grasps the meaning of Scripture, perceives its powerful relevance to the life of the individual, church or society, and proclaims that message fearlessly.

  The gift of prophecy seems to function in at least two ways at this level:
  1. Public preaching where someone with the gift of prophecy does what I'm doing now and proclaims a message, from God's Word applied to the situation at hand.
  2. Personal ministry where in one-on-one relationships or in a small group, counsel and ministry is given to to other believers

TWO EXTREMES WE AVOID:

- One extreme: The spiritual gift of prophecy has ceased to exist. Some come to that conclusion based upon a faulty understanding of I Corinthians 13:8.

  1 Corinthians 13:8 (NIV) - Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

  Paul is describing what will happen when we all get to heaven, not the closing of the Canon or the death of the apostles. My conviction is that the spiritual gifts continue to operate right through to the coming of Christ.

- The other extreme is to say that gifts like prophecy operate above the Scriptures or even on the same level as Scripture so that when someone with the gift of prophecy speaks, that it carries the same weight as the written Word of God. We resist that extreme. Prophecy must be based

upon God's written revelation, and a prophecy's validity is measured first by comparing it to Scripture.

Note: Sometimes people take prophecy to mean, "God told me to do this," or "God is telling you to do this." And it has no connection to the Word of God. But they claim that it is a prophecy. We learn from I Corinthians 14 that there is an accountability built into this gift. If someone says, "I've heard from God on this," then it must be weighed by others in the church as to whether it is consistent with God's revealed truth in Scripture, and if so, is the application really from God.

So prophecy is a speaking gift. It is also a …

2. A <u>SUPERIOR</u> GIFT (vv.1-2)

1 Corinthians 14:1 (NIV) - Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

There is a premium then place upon the gift of prophecy. And we are encouraged to "eagerly desire" particularly the spiritual gift of prophecy.

1 Corinthians 14:2 (NIV) - For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.

Note: Now I Corinthians 14 is the climax of the teaching on spiritual gifts. Paul is about to set straight some crooked thinking in the church, particularly as it related to the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. I will go into this gift in detail next week and try to explain what it is. But today, we see that there is a gift that is superior to tongues, and that gift is prophecy.

Why is prophecy a superior gift? Well, because it is also …

3. A <u>STRENGTHENING</u> GIFT (vv.3-12)

There were people in the church who apparently had the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues is unintelligible speech, that, unless it was interpreted did absolutely no good to the congregation. It may be gratifying and uplifting to the person speaking, praying or singing in tongues, but it was not benefiting the church. That's why prophecy is considered a superior gift to tongues, because prophecy is intelligible, people can understand it, and it strengthens the church.

1 Corinthians 14:3 (NIV) – But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

People with the gift of prophecy help us by proclaiming God's Word and speaking truth into our lives:

- **Truth that <u>strengthens</u>.** Here we see the first of many references in I Corinthians 14 to the strengthening and edifying that goes on, particularly through the gift of prophecy.

The word "strengthen" means "to edify." The word is a word that was used to describe the building of a house. The word "edifice" is connected to this word "edify." An edifice is a building.

ILLUSTRATION – Just outside our sanctuary a large building is being built. I've been watching it from a window just outside my study upstairs. It's fascinating. This past week they've been drilling holes in the ground, dozens of them. And they poured concrete down in those holes to create piers upon which the foundation will rest. They are nearly as deep as this building is tall. This building will be strong when it is finished. There will be a solid foundation poured. And the solid walls will be constructed. And the building will be "built up." That's the meaning of the word "edify." That's our business as a church … to build up lives. And one of the most important spiritual gifts for that purpose is the gift of prophecy.

- **Truth that encourages.** The word "encouraging" means to come alongside. It's the word that Jesus used to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit … Helper, Encourager.

  Note: I need to correct a misperception that is commonly held in the church. Many people have this tendency to like to tell other people off. And they do it under the guise of "prophecy." It's like they think that if they have the gift of prophecy that they are excused from the common courtesies and kindness called for in Christlikeness.

- **Truth that comforts.** We all need to be consoled, to be calmed at times.

Note: The gift of prophecy in the hands of the Holy Spirit can do amazing things in the church.

Acts 9:31 (NIV) - Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

How did this strengthening and encouraging happen? I believe it happened through the ministry of prophecy.

That's why it's so important to …

1 Corinthians 14:12 (NIV) - So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

Note: How much conversation and discussions in the church do not build up other people, do not edify them.

This is crucial in our ministry, not just at church, but also to our mates and our children. Do we tear them down with our conversations and our cutting comments, or do we build them up with encouraging comments.

4. A <u>STIRRING GIFT</u> (vv.22-25)

1 Corinthians 14:22 (NIV) - Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; <u>prophecy, however, is for believers</u>, not for unbelievers.

Prophecy should be the "language" of believers in the church. A church without the healthy functioning of the gift of prophecy is a dysfunctional, malfunctioning church.

But there is a side-benefit to the gift of prophecy being exercised in the church.

1 Corinthians 14:24-25 (NIV) - But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, [25] and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

Note: Would you notice that it is expected that non-believers will be present in the gatherings of God's people. How do they end up there? Probably invited by their believing friends. This is to be the norm for church life. "Make Friends."

> Paul is talking about the preaching of God's truth. When that happens the Word brings people under conviction about the truth. The Holy Spirit is the one who, according to John 16, who will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. The person begins to see themselves as they really are.
>
> The secrets of his heart are laid bare. Ever been in a situation where someone was speaking the truth and you wondered, "How did they know that about me?"
>
> Ah, what powerful ministry … conviction of sin and under the hand of God's judgment, secrets laid bare, leading to completely worship.

And people come away saying, "God is really among you! God is here!" That's our goal for every worship service, every gathering of God's people … that every one of us would come to the conclusion, "God is here. He is speaking to me."

CONCLUSION

Notice there is a response … "He will fall down and worship…" What's your response to God's presence, and the speaking of truth into your life today?