

“Signs and Wonders”

Fixing Our Eyes On Jesus, Our High Priest

Hebrews 2:1-4

Rev. Jeff Stivason

March 16, 2018

Jeff: Heavenly Father, we are thankful for this day and for the many blessings You provide for us. Father, we know that we do not belong to ourselves, but You’ve bought us with a price. You purchased us at the cost of Your own blessed Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And Father, as we gather here this morning, we are thankful for that and mindful of it, and we recognize that without Him and His work, without the Holy Spirit opening our eyes to it, we would never recognize it. We would never see the beauty of it or know the benefits of belonging to You. And yet because of Your great love for us when we were yet sinners, You did all that on our behalf, and brought us to the spiritual attention to which we are now. Father, we ask and pray that You’ll continue to bless us, causing us to grow in grace, to become more and more of what we already are in Christ Jesus.

And Father, as we think about that, we pray that You will open our eyes to the text of Scripture that we’re studying this morning. We pray that You will help us and lead us. We pray, Father, where there are difficulties that You will indeed content us till we can study more and come to a greater understanding. And yet, Father, we also pray for those mentioned this morning, especially for Sandy. And we pray that you will bless her as she continues to deal with those symptoms that have recurred. And we pray, Father, that Your hand would be upon her for good.

Lord, we do pray for our brother Bruce, that You would continue to mend his body as well. And Father, we’re asking that You will bless us together today, and we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Well let’s turn to Hebrews chapter 2 and the first four verses again this morning. I’m going to read those verses to you and then I’ll make some comments about what it is that we’re going to be doing today. So Hebrews chapter 2, verses 1-4. Listen to God’s word.

“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.” All right.

Participant: This is—

Jeff: This is—

Men: The word of the Lord.

Jeff: The word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: You threw me. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Once an Anglican, always an Anglican. *(Laughter)*

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Jeff: You know, I was thinking that while I prayed , Ted. I was thinking. It’s early! It’s early! *(Laughter)*

All right. Well let me tell you what we’re going to do this morning. We’re going to look at some *introductory material*. We’re going to look at some *textual tension*. We’re going to look at something that’s going to *exacerbate the tension*. And then we’re going to *let God be God*.

Now I realize that that is self-explanatory just by looking at that outline. *(Laughter)* But let me explain a little bit further what I’m going to be talking about. I want us to deal with verses 3 and 4 this morning. I want us to think about the signs and the wonders and the miracles that are there in the text. This was raised last time at the end. And I made some comments to you at that time. And I thought that I made those comments kind of hastily.

And I thought that it might be a good idea for me to go back and explain to you my position on this, or at least the way in which I think about this, because I put those things out to you the last time. And it seemed to me that you had some questions and things that you wanted to interact with regarding this particular subject. So I thought that it might be good for us to just camp here for a class and talk about these things.

Now I have a direction that I want to go in, but you can feel free to interact with me as we go along. However, before we go further, I thought it might be good for me to put my presuppositions upon the screen. Just so you know, I’m going to lay my cards on the table. *(Laughter)*

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff shows a slide of playing cards on a Black Jack table.

Jeff: I thought that was good. *(Laughter)* Anyway, first of all, I want you to know that I believe that *the spiritual gifts exist today*.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Yes. Amen! That is not to say that I believe that all function today. But I do believe that spiritual gifts exist today.

The second thing is that I believe that *miracles still happen*. I won’t spend the time now telling you, but I think that my own wife experienced a healing about 25 years ago that was remarkable and concrete and wonderful! It’s been wonderful for us for a long time. And so I believe that miracles still happen. I think that we have experienced one as a family.

I doubt present-day healers.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: I doubt that the gift of healing given to men continues today, okay? *Certain modes of the Spirit’s operation have ceased*. Certain modes of operation have ceased. And yet the Spirit’s activity has not ceased. And I’ll talk more about that as we get there. Those are just some basic presuppositions that I have that I think might be important for you to know up front—the cards on the table kind of thing.

All right. So let’s just work through some introductory points this morning as we think about this. When we talk about spiritual gifts, I think that the underlying issue, when we talk about the cessationist position and what that always tends to lean toward, is that God gets put in a box. Or if you’re open but cautious, depending on how cautious you are,

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God gets put in a box. And I think that underlying that whole discussion tends in the direction that people think that something is missing. Something is missing.

And what do I mean by that? Well, let’s think about this. We have *sola Scriptura*. We have Scripture, and Scripture is final. There’s nothing to be added to Scripture. We believe that the Canon is closed. And so it’s not something Scriptural that needs to be added. It’s not something Scriptural that’s missing.

Tradition. We all come out of a certain tradition. And yet hopefully, collectively, we are part of the *catholic* tradition—not the Roman Catholic tradition, but the catholic tradition which really began in the Garden after the Fall. But really, when we think about it, it starts with the establishment of the New Testament church and the traditions that grow out of that.

But we need to remember that though we may be Presbyterian or Anglican, though we may be Baptists, there is a common tradition that we share. And we may think that there’s something lacking in that tradition. But I don’t think that’s what we’re talking about.

Then there’s *experience*. We all have a certain experience with regard to the Christian faith. And I think that in some instances it depends upon our particular denominational tradition. It certainly depends upon our dependence upon Scripture. But I think that experience is such a personal thing that when we ask, “What’s missing in this discussion?”, that we often engage about spiritual things, spiritual gifts, spiritual experiences, that it’s the experience that we often think about when we get here.

So I want us to talk about this for just a second. I think it’s important to understand what we mean when we talk about a *spiritual experience*. One of the things that I’ve noticed is that when you talk to people about spiritual experience after they come to a church that is more subdued in the way that it worships, versus a church that is not so subdued. You know what the Presbyterian form of *Amen* is, don’t you?

Participant: Seconds.

Jeff: So if you’re a Presbyterian, this is the Amen.

Transcriber’s Note: Silence.

(Laughter)

Jeff: Now if you’re really excited, this is it. *(Laughter)* Look at the person next to you, right? *(Laughter)* Now we have a tendency to think that expressions are the way that we ought to measure spiritual experience. And I don’t think that’s the case.

Participant: Good.

Jeff: Now I think that emotions enter into it. But I think that often, when we talk about emotions, one of the problems is that we get a little bit fouled up.

Now let me explain what I mean. The Puritans used to talk about *passions* and *affections*. Now what’s a passion? Well, the word *passion* is related to the Latin word from which we get our word *patient*. And when you are a patient, you are acted upon by external factors, okay? You’re acted upon by a disease. You’re acted upon by a nurse. You’re acted upon by a doctor. And that produces something in you.

And so when we say in the Westminster Confession that God is “*without passions*,” which is what the historic church has always said, what we mean is that God is not a

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patient. God is not acted upon so to elicit some sort of emotion. God is not a patient. He doesn't have passions.

We have passions. When somebody comes into the room who we don't particularly like, we may sense that (*grunt*)—you know, that (*grunt*.) That's being passionate or a patient, in that sense. We are acted upon by external factors. And our emotions engage in unholy, unrighteous ways.

But then there are *affections*. And the Puritans used to talk about affections as being that which came from within, those things which were stirred up in us by the Holy Spirit. And so the Holy Spirit acts upon us.

In other words, we're reading the Scriptures. And the Holy Spirit causes us to love what we're reading. In other words, He causes us to fall in love with God, the God of the Bible. And all of a sudden, we feel like the Puritans and Jonathan Edwards used to say, that our hearts are strangely warmed. And we think to ourselves, “I don't know what made me think this way, but I love God more today, more this moment, than I ever have before.” You know, that sort of thing. And that's an affection.

And historically, we've said that God has affections. They arise from within. And He has something like emotions. I say “like” because we can't say that He does have emotions. But we can say that He has something like emotions—affections, holy affections. And that's what we have.

Now here's the deal. We have a tendency to think that if something is external to us and can excite us, that must be holy emotions. But I'm here to say that's just passions. It's when the Holy Spirit internally engages our emotions that those are affections. And that's really what we ought to be thinking about when we think about a spiritual life. Our emotions will be engaged either way. The question is what has engaged our emotions?

I have a tendency to think that when we think about this, we have a tendency to think about what impacts us externally and not internally. That's my presupposition; I'm sharing that with you now.

So are we missing something? Have we misunderstood? I think we have. I think we have missed something in the discussion. I think we've not only missed something. I think we've misunderstood what we ought to be thinking about and what we ought to be focusing on as we think about a spiritual engagement of sorts.

Now I think that the emphasis ought to fall then on those things that God has promised He will use to bring about affections in our lives. He has promised *the means of grace*. The means of grace will bring to faith. They will grow in faith. They will confirm faith. They will do what God has promised to do.

So, you know, when we preach the Word, we trust that the Word preached is not only a converting ordinance, but we also trust that it's a confirming ordinance. In other words, we trust that the preaching of the Word will bring people to faith because the Holy Spirit will use it to bear upon their lives. Or we trust that God will use it to strengthen our own spiritual lives, right?

And what else? There are the sacraments. And there are those things that God has promised to use to stir affections up within us.

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I’m just going to go out on a limb here and say that the problem is that there are things that we think. You know, let’s put it this way. I’m going to go out on a limb. I’m just going to throw it out there. I’m going to say that sometimes we think that the praise band elicits more spirituality than the sacraments.

Participant: Oh, yes.

Jeff: And that’s backwards.

Participant: Yes.

Jeff: Because the praise band is being like a patient, and the sacrament has an affection quality to it. To me, that’s the difference.

So when we focus upon a discussion like this, if we really want a vital spirituality, our discussion, our focus needs to be on the means of grace that God has promised to work through in order to bring a spiritual vitality to the life of the Christian.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Okay, so what’s lacking here? Maybe it’s not a spiritual experience so much as a catch word we can use, like *maturity*. We need to be mature. And part of being mature is engaging in those things that God has given us to engage in. Okay?

So for instance,--and I just throw this out there; I’m not going to spend time with it,-- but I throw this out there because 1 Corinthians says, look. You’ve got what? You’ve got virtues like faith, hope and love. And you’ve got gifts like speaking in tongues and prophecy. And he says this. Which will last? Which will endure? The virtues will endure. The gifts will pass away. The virtues will endure.

So we need to be focusing on maturity, that which will cultivate those things which will last. And those things which will cultivate maturity are the means of grace. And that’s what we need to be thinking about.

Well I’m going to pause there. I know I’ve said a lot. Does anybody want to follow up on anything at this point? Any questions? Yes?

Participant: I just want to say a word on behalf of music, but not necessarily those bands. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Yeah, right; I understand that.

Participant: It seems to me, that when you get a text for singing that’s Biblical, there are times when God seems to use the music with the text in a very powerful way, which is to bring you deeper into the Word.

Second Participant: There you go.

Jeff: And the danger of saying that was this. That’s why I said “praise band,” because sometimes that has a tendency not to be so Biblically focused.

Participant: Yes, right. It’s kind of pumping up the emotions.

Second Participant: There you go.

Third Participant: Let me just say in respect to that that the Scripture does say, “*Speak to one another and sing to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.*” So then it is sort of an affection.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. I should have been more clear. I didn’t mean to say that singing as an element is—

Participant: It can be part of the Word.

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Jeff: Yes.

Participant: But singing and music are natural affections. Singing and music will always motivate people, whether it’s for godly purposes or ungodly purposes. We know that. The sacrament is different in that it doesn’t seem to have, on its surface, any motivational power.

Jeff: And that’s a good point; sure.

Participant: Before I moved elsewhere, one of the members of this church gave me 24 CDs of music from the ‘50s and the ‘60s.

Second Participant: Yeah, yeah!

First Participant: That always takes me someplace else. *(Laughter)* And it’s not talking about Jesus. It’s like, “Oh, Donna! Oh, Donna! I knew a girl and Donna was her name.”

Second Participant: Richie Valens.

First Participant: I mean, that takes me to another place. That’s natural. But the sacrament is different. And I think that many churches, especially evangelical churches, really have no strong doctrine of the sacraments.

Jeff: That’s right.

Participant: They don’t teach them, and therefore it’s kind of an afterthought. But the Reformers always felt that the sacraments were secondary and a critical purpose to the preaching of the Word. And we’ve lost that.

I mean, we once went to a service that was being held. My daughter was in a dancing contest and they had a service the next morning. And they had a praise band coming out of their wazoo. And then at the last minute they said, “We’ve got ten minutes left. We need to do the sacrament now.” And they passed out little cups with grape juice in them, just like we have for milk. And I refused to take it because it was done in an unworthy fashion.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: And for that church the praise band and the evangelistic “come to Jesus” sermons were more important than the sacrament.

Jeff: Yes. And you know, just going back to that natural affection—

Participant: I mean, music will always do that.

Jeff: Who said, “Let somebody else right the laws of the nation and I’ll write the songs?” It was a Scottish guy from several hundred years ago, but I can’t think of his name right now.

Participant: Robert Burns.

Jeff: What was his name?

Participant: Oh, I don’t know.

Jeff: Oh, you don’t know. *(Laughter)* All right. So let’s think about the text for a minute. I just want to put this up on the board.

This is our text for today. *“It was attested to us who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to His will.”* And I want to play that off against Hebrews 1:1-2.

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“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.”

Now let me say a word about this comparison. But before I do that, let me say another word about signs, wonders and miracles.

I look at that as a Hebraism in the New Testament Greek. What I mean is, I look at that as a way of taking the *“holy, holy, holy”* over into the Greek language, and now using three synonymous terms to build that same repetition. So signs, wonders and miracles aren't necessarily three different things. It would be like in Acts 2, *“Jesus being attested to you by signs and wonders and miracles.”* In other words, Jesus was attested to you in an emphatic sort of way, just like God is *“holy, holy, holy.”* That's a Hebraism. So I don't think there's necessarily anything to the three different uses, though those three different terms may be used in various ways scattered throughout the New Testament.

Compare these two texts and you see the tension. The tension, or the possible tension, is that there were *“signs and wonders and various miracles,”* distributed all by God's will. And yet long ago, there were certain things that seemed to have ceased in light of the Son's appearance.

Now the question is how do we interpret this? Well I'm going to give you a couple of comparisons just to drive this home—this idea that long ago, something was said to our fathers. And in these last days something was said to us by the Son. Who did it? *“God spoke”* sort of brings the two together. So long ago, in these days, God spoke through prophets. Now He has spoken through His Son.

There's a sense then in which there's a climax to all that was said before being now said in the Son. The Son is the Alpha Originator of these prophecies, and He's the Omega Climax of these prophecies.

And I think that when you look at the text that way, and when you look at commentators on this text, one of the things that they'll say is that there's a finality to God's speaking in the Son.

So how should we read this? Well I'm going to give you one interpretation of how this ought to be read, and it's historically based. It's the Westminster Confession.

And it says this. *“Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times and in diverse manners,”*—you can see Hebrews 1 in this, right?—*“And in diverse manners to declare His will unto His church, and afterwards to commit the same wholly unto writing, which makes the holy Scripture to be most necessary, those former ways of God revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.”*

In other words, what we find here is that the Westminster divines were saying that certain modes of God's communicating His will to us have now ceased, okay? Now the thing that you might say is this. Well, how do we know that this was the idea of the Reformers?

Well, the interesting thing is this. Dave Dixon. Dave Dixon and I were very good friends. We grew up in high school together. We did, but that's a different Dave Dixon. *(Laughter)* David Dixon was a contemporary of the Westminster assembly. And he wrote a commentary called *Truth's Victory Over Error*, on the Westminster Confession. So he was a contemporary of the assembly.

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And this is what he said in *Truth's Victory Over Error*. He said, “Because God, who at sundry times and diverse manners”—you see Hebrews again!—“spake in times past unto our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by the Son”—Hebrews 1:1-2. “The apostle calls the time of the New Testament ‘the last days’, because under the same there is no more alteration to be expected. But all things are to abide without adding or taking away, as was taught and ordained by Christ until the last day.”

So a contemporary of the Westminster assembly looks at what the divines wrote and says that there’s a finality to certain modes of God’s handling the distribution of His will to His people.

Now let me put this in the context of what I said the last time about the *historia salutis*. When you think about the *historia salutis*, I did this one time for a Bible study. I took and cut out slips of paper, and for instance I put “the Resurrection” on one, and I put “the death of Christ” on another, and I put “the life of Christ” on another, and then I put “fellowship.” And then I put “justification by faith” and “sanctification.” And I scattered them out on the floor and I said, “I have two envelopes here.” One envelope had the history of redemption on it, the *historia salutis*. And the other envelope had the *ordo salutis* on it, the order of salvation.

And I said to the people, “As we gather up these slips of paper, we need to put these slips of paper in one of these two envelopes.” And you know how that went. They said that the death of Christ obviously belongs in the *historia salutis*. And they said that justification belongs in the order of salvation. The resurrection of Christ belongs in the *ordo*. And sanctification belongs in the *ordo*, right? Back and forth, back and forth. They understood that there was the work of Christ historically conceived, and there was the application of that work to us. And they saw and understood that the history of redemption and the order of its application to us were two different things.

And then all of a sudden we got to Pentecost. And I said, “Where does Pentecost belong?”

And some said, “Well, it belongs in the application.” And others said, “Oh, no; it belongs in the history.”

It belongs in the historical envelope. Jesus, was not only resurrected from the dead, but ascended into heaven to receive the Spirit from the Father, and so sent Him upon the church. And that is part of the historical work of Jesus Christ. It doesn’t end at the Resurrection.

Participant: Yes.

Jeff: It proceeds through to the Ascension and to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And that’s clear from Scripture when you look at it.

So when you think about Hebrews 2:3-4, here’s what I’m thinking. I’m not just thinking about Pentecost. I’m thinking about the book of Acts, which helps us to understand that the book of Acts didn’t just have Pentecost in mind, but Pentecost as it went from Judea to the ends of the earth. And that’s the way that the book of Acts unfolds. And so the book of Acts in one sense is the climactic *historia salutis* aspect of Jesus’ work. So that’s the way I’m understanding it.

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Now that means that this just simply confirms, to my way of thinking, that there is some finality to the work of Jesus Christ. And there’s some finality to the mode of God’s communicating to us that work in His Son.

Now that brings us to an important conclusion, and it’s this. And it’s what I’ve been saying. Certain modes have ceased. *But the activity of the Holy Spirit has not ceased.*

Participant: That’s right.

Jeff: Now that gets into some things. I’m hoping to show you something. So let me travel on to the next part because I want to get to the next two sections because I think they’re really important. I don’t want to leave you with this, because that would be like leaving you with last week.

So let’s exacerbate the tension a bit, and let’s talk about *prophecy*, this kind of revelatory aspect. What does it mean?

Well, Wayne Grudham is a Reformed man who is called a *continuationist*. He believes in the continuation of the gift of prophecy.

Now I want to explain to you his view as it comes out of his book. Now I’ve reduced it to a very simple way of understanding, and I think it’s accurate. I’m trying to simplify without distorting. But he believes that Old Testament prophets had the very word of God in their proclamation with the very authority of God, okay? Now we all believe that. We’d all buy into that. No problem here.

He believed that the Old Testament prophets were continued in the apostles. And he believed that the New Testament apostles then carried the very words of God in their writings and the very authority of God. In other words, he sees a parallel between the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. Easy. Nothing that unnerves us at that point.

But then he talks about New Testament prophets. And he says, “*The New Testament prophets do not speak the very words of God, though they may, nor do they possess the absolute authority of God.*” In other words, New Testament prophets and their prophecies are not infallible and they’re not authoritative.

Now that’s why Wayne Grudham goes to great lengths to show that Agabus was a mistaken prophet in Acts 11:25-26.

Transcriber’s Note: Acts 11:25-26. “*Now in these days prophets came up from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world. This took place in the days of Claudius.*”

Jeff: He wants us to understand that the New Testament prophet is not like the Old Testament prophet. And he’s not like the apostle. He could be mistaken, and in fact Agabus was mistaken.

Now I think this gets into problems when you look at a text like 1 Corinthians 12:28. In 1 Corinthians 12:28—you can go there; if you don’t I’ll read it to you and you can jot it down and look at it later. It says this, and it seems to be putting them into an order of some kind. “*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets.*” Now Grudham says that’s New Testament prophets. “*Third teachers,*” and so on.

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When you think about that in terms of order, like Paul puts them there, one of the things that you have to ask yourself is well, wait a minute. Are we saying that New Testament prophets are second in order of importance, coming before the idea of the teacher who teaches from the Word?

Now do you see what that automatically does? If the prophet speaks fallible words that could be mistaken that don't carry the authority of God, and yet the teacher uses the infallible word of God to teach, do you see what that does? It sort of puts apostles, New Testament prophets and men who handle the infallible Word in a strange order.

You say, “Well, what's your view?” My view is that there were still prophets in the day of the New Testament, not fallible ones. There were prophets in the day.

The question that this raises then, if we see it the way that Grudham sees it, is this. How do we judge a prophecy that's fallible and doesn't carry the authority of God with it? Well the only way that you can do that is to say this. Does it violate a command at some point? Does it violate some Biblical command?

Let's say it like this. Who's single in the room?

Transcriber's Note: The single men raise their hands.

Jeff: Okay. I've got a girl for you. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Oh?

Second Participant: Just tell Don that you're not pointing to him. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I want to tell you. I've got a word from the Lord. Don, I've got a word from the Lord for you, too. I've got a word from the Lord for you. You ought to marry Annie.

Now does that violate a Biblical command, that you should marry Annie if Annie is a Christian? No. So obviously, I've filled in where the Scriptures were lacking for you, right? I mean, how else do you deal with this?

I can't think of the name of the guy who writes it, but it's in his *renewal theology*. It's a charismatic theology. He says that it has to be left open-ended like that. If it doesn't violate a Biblical command, then you have to take it at face value. It's a word from the Lord. So, you know, unless you want to disobey the Lord, you've got to marry my friend Annie, right? *(Laughter)* I mean, that's the implication of it, right? I've got to tell you a couple stories. Anyway, that's the point; you get it. *(Laughter)*

Where does wisdom come in in this view? I mean, where do we leave wisdom? Where in the world does wisdom come in? In other words, we know that a guy is looking for a girl, and I say, “I've got a word from the Lord for you. You've got to marry this girl.”

And yet, what about the principles of Scripture, and the man left to his own wisdom in Christ to apply those to any context? I think wisdom needs to come to the fore in our day in a way that it hasn't before, and not New Testament fallible prophecy. Fallible prophecy appears better than the infallible Bible, and I don't think that's where we want to be. Yes, Don?

Don: I think that the problem with the idea of fallible prophecy is that in the Old Testament, if the words of a prophet didn't come true, you were stoned; you were toast.

Jeff: Yes.

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Don: And I’ve heard plenty of people in our day who claim to be prophets and predicted things that would come to pass and who said, “This is the word of the Lord.” It hasn’t happened. And in the Old Testament they would have been toast.

Jeff: Yes. I remember listening to a guy preach in a town where I was pastoring before Y2K. I was having personal dialogues with him, so I was listening to some of his sermons. And what he said was this. He gave people counsel about what to do, but it wasn’t counsel. He was telling them that this was a word from the Lord. And at one point he said, “I don’t know how long this is going to last.

And then you could hear it. Somebody from the congregation said, “Thirty days.”

And he said, “This is a word from the Lord. It will last thirty days.” You know what I mean? That’s the way they operated. It was really interesting. Yes?

Participant: Another way this is bad in our culture is that we have a young Christian lady who had a son with a terminal illness, and the son has died.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: And another well-meaning Christian comes along and says, “God told me that your son is not going to die.” And then the son died. What happens to the new believer’s faith?

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: There would be a lot of preachers who are toast, too.

Jeff: Yes. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Jeff, I don’t know if I’m hitting off on this thing here. But you were talking about the new prophets versus the old prophets. Am I wrong in thinking that the Bible tells me that the last prophet gave the sacrament of anointing to the king before Daniel. And Daniel himself, he was the true last prophet. Now when you say old prophets versus new prophets, is there a difference? Did Jesus talk to them and they became prophets? I’m a little confused on that.

Jeff: No. I think you should include all of the Old Testament prophets into that. I mean, John the Baptist is even a prophet.

Participant: Yes, the greatest.

Jeff: And Christ’s offices are Prophet, Priest and King. So there’s a sense in which He is the final voice of God.

Participant: But the prophet that anointed Daniel and the king before him got killed. Daniel took over. Who was that prophet?

Jeff: I’m not sure I’m following you.

Second Participant: Samuel anointed David.

First Participant: I thought that in the Bible it says that he was the last prophet.

Jeff: No. I think he was the last judge. I think Samuel was the last judge. I think that’s what you’re confusing that with.

Participant: Isn’t part of the problem that we don’t have an accurate definition of prophecy, that prophecy is not necessarily predicting the future?

Jeff: Well, that’s part of the problem. A lot of these guys, whether it’s the renewal theology or Wayne Grudham in the Reformed camp, is how you define the gift of wisdom or the gift of knowledge or the gift of prophecy. Part of the criticism that I would

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have with that kind of crowd is that if the Spirit is bringing these gifts to the fore of the church once again, then how come you can't even agree on definitions for them, right? That's part of the problem.

And I think this part is really important to what we're doing today. You have an idea of what I'm saying. But let me say this. I think that we need to take into account what I said before. The Holy Spirit has ceased in some of the modes by which He speaks. But the Spirit's activity continues. And what I mean by that is that *He illuminates His word*.

And so, for instance, you may have heard me say this. You heard me say that *Jesus is the final Word*. And yet you probably said to yourself, “Well, wait a minute. Didn't the apostles write the infallible word of God?”

But think about it. If you take into account that they were part of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to write the Scriptures, then they are writing the Spirit-inspired, final word of Christ, right? So there's a sense in which they are cumulatively explaining Christ to us. And therefore they become, in a sense, His final word.

And so when you think about the Spirit's illumination, when you think about it like that, the Spirit inspires this text of Scripture. And yet the Spirit continues to illuminate this text of Scripture.

Now here's the problem with us. We have a tendency to say, when we think about illumination, that He either opens my eyes to the knowledge of the gospel, or that He helps me to understand the text in a way that I didn't understand it before.

But let me give you a couple of examples that will help you to think outside the box. At the end of Wayne Grudham's book he gives a story about Charles Spurgeon. And Charles Spurgeon, a famous Baptist preacher of the Victorian era, is up in the pulpit. He's preaching, and he's preaching about the Sabbath. And all of a sudden he looks at a man, and he calls a man out for things that the man has been doing, and he has never met the man before in his life. And later on the man said, “I'd never met Spurgeon before. And yet he was dead on with what I was doing.” And Spurgeon was calling him out. I meant to bring the story and read it to you and I left it on the table.

But therein Spurgeon is preaching the Word. And the Spirit illuminates the text in its application beyond what Spurgeon himself could have enjoyed even by reflection.

Participant: That's right.

Jeff: Let me give you a personal example. This only ever happened to me once in my life. Years ago I was in a situation. I was filling in as an interim minister. I was hired to be there for a month, and then they extended it to two months and three, and then they asked me to stay for a year while they looked for a minister. And the church was absolutely horrendous; it was just a mess. In fact, I left because, at the last session meeting I attended, I opened the Scriptures and I read them in sort of a way of counsel and even rebuke to all of us who sat there. And the lead elder looked at me and said, “You do not expect us to believe that crap, do you?” That's exactly what she said.

Men: Whew!

Jeff: And I said, “I resign right here on the spot. I won't be back.”

Anyway, it was that meeting. Now I can't tell you all the ins and the outs of what was happening. But here I am. I'm ready to go to this meeting. I'm young. I have no

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experience. I’m petrified. I’m in over my head. I shouldn’t even be in this position, right? I’m a zealous young man without any knowledge, right?

I’m praying before I go. I won’t say his name, but there was a man who was going to be at that meeting. He just terrified me. And I was praying Psalm 35. I was just praying the Psalm. And I read this verse as I was praying. *“Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it, and let the net that he hid ensnare him. Let him fall into it to his destruction.”*

And I read that verse. And the Lord immediately spoke, however you want to say it. He illuminated that text to me. And I knew with absolute certainty that that man would not be at that meeting that night.

And I even said to my wife, “He’s not going to be there.”

She said, “How do you know?”

I said, “You’re going to think this is crazy, but I have absolute certainty that he’s not going to be at that meeting tonight.”

And I went to the meeting and he wasn’t there. I sat on the couch and I was waiting. And the meeting started and I said, “Where is so and so?”

And they said, “He called earlier and he said that he wasn’t going to be able to make it tonight.” I wanted to say, “I knew that.” *(Laughter)*

But I think, as I’ve reflected on it over the years, that this wasn’t a new revelation. But that was the Spirit taking the Scriptures and illuminating them to my own situation.

Participant: Yes.

Jeff: So what happens here? The Scripture stays primary, and the Spirit’s work, using His word, continues in ways that we may not expect.

And so you say to me, “Well, wait a minute.” I’m willing to admit possible exceptions, okay? I’m willing to admit them—I know you can read that. I’m willing to admit them because I think that men smarter and much greater have said things like this.

George Gillespie, who was the youngest member of the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster assembly said, *“And now having the occasion, I must say to the glory of God that there were in the church of Scotland both in the time of our first Reformation and after the Reformation such extraordinary men as were more than ordinary pastors and teachers, even holy prophets receiving extraordinary revelation from God, and foretelling diverse strange and remarkable things, which did accordingly come to pass punctually, to the great admiration of all who knew the particulars.”*

And then Calvin’s Institutes 4:3-4 says, *“Paul applies the name ‘prophets’ not to all those who were interpreters of God’s will”—in other words, like pastors,—“but to those who excelled in a particular revelation. This class either does not exist today, or is less commonly seen.”* And in the sentence before that he makes mention that this class of men could arise during particular reformations of the church.

So I would say that those are the possible exceptions. And that leads me to say that I’m open but cautious, but more cautious than open. *(Laughter)* I’m finished. Do you have anything that you want to add to that? *(Laughter)* In more ways than one. Yes, go ahead.

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Participant: I was going to say that I think that one of the things the Lord is doing as He incorporates the church, the body of Christ, is in terms of maybe God wants people to receive revelation from the Lord, and this is what He wants me to do type of thing. Personally, for a call into the ministry, I had that inward call. But it had to be confirmed by the church, that this was something they also believed was from God.

Jeff: You do that with elders too, right?

Participant: Today we’re so individualistic. People think, “I’ve got a word from the Lord, and I don’t care what anybody else says. This is what I’m supposed to do.” And there is the possibility that is true, that everybody else could be wrong. But I think you’re going to be on very shaky ground. Personally, when I’m preaching, (*unclear*), I will not say anything unless I’m able to find somebody else who has said the same thing. That’s a safer policy than someone going off in many different directions. That corporate aspect is important.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: There’s a text from St. Paul that I’d love to hear you comment on. It’s in 1 Corinthians the fourteenth chapter. I’m going to start with verse 36. “*Or was it from you that the word of God came? Are you the only ones it has reached?*” 37. “*If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.*” So here’s the apostolic authority. “*If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.*” So there’s the apostolic discipline. “*So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.*” What do you think Paul is talking about?

Jeff: Well I’ll tell you what I think. I think that when you look at this text, and he says to them earlier on that it’s better that someone prophesies when a new person comes into the congregation, so that they might hear and be saved. If they come in when you’re speaking in tongues, they won’t understand.

So I have looked at that in terms not of *foretelling* but *forthtelling*. And so that would fit with the apostolic authority I keeping with the preaching of the Word and applying the Word to the congregation. That’s how I’ve always looked at it. Yes, Don?

Don: A two-pronged question.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: #1. What is your definition of a miracle? And #2. I’ve heard and read of accounts where Muslims have had dreams where Jesus supposedly appeared to them and they become saved, they become Christians. Do you think that is possible with what you were talking about earlier?

Jeff: Well let me start backwards, because that’s what I’ve done most of my life. (*Laughter*) I actually think that the Lord used a dream to bring me to faith. I think that was a crucial part of my coming to faith.

One night I had a dream that I was going to hell. And I woke up shaken by that. And I think that there were a couple of things in my life that happened at that moment, sort of around that time. But that dream was a fairly instrumental thing that sort of shook me.

So I think that the Lord can use these things. But I think we have to be careful. I can put that under the fact that I heard about hell, right? And so I think that was the Lord

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using something in my life that I had already known to bring it about. I think I was having an anxiety about the way I was living anyway. I was going to church every Sunday and knew there was a problem, and so forth.

But there are stories about God doing things in the lives of people who have never heard the Scriptures, you know? And that’s where I don’t want to put God in a box and say that things can’t happen in ways that I wouldn’t expect them to happen.

So the first question is how would I define a miracle?

Don: Yes.

Jeff: How I define a miracle is something visible, where God takes something and removes a step in the process, for instance, in turning water into wine. They had the water that then becomes wine. But He takes out the middle step, and so it miraculously becomes wine.

Twenty-five years ago, with my wife and her eyes, there was a problem. She was bleeding and the bleeding was uncontrollable, and we couldn’t get it to stop. They were using means to get it to stop. We took her to the church and had her prayed for, and the bleeding stopped. So there was this aspect where here was something happening that was wrong, and God stopped it in the face of various other means that could not stop it.

So there’s a visible righting or correcting of something, or a visible skipping over of steps in order to bring about a completion. I know that’s not a complete definition.

Don: And the Westminster Confession says that God is free to do that. It doesn’t say that God was free, but He is free to work above those things.

Jeff: Yes, sure.

Participant: Jeff, I think that the real danger of those experiences is not that they’re not of God, but that in some cases they may not be of God. And yet we use that experience to interpret Scripture.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: And that’s a dangerous thing, when you put the experience before the Scripture.

Jeff: Absolutely. That’s why, when I tell my testimony, especially depending on where I’m going to tell it, I’m careful to put different emphases in different places because of that very thing.

Participant: And never will the Holy Spirit contradict the Scripture.

Jeff: Absolutely.

Participant: I think that was all I was trying to say, and that is, no matter which position you take on this, everything must be tested by Scripture.

Jeff: That’s right.

Participant: Once you cut that loose,--and I used to be an Episcopalian, so I know about that. You know, we’re all fallible, even in our application of Scripture. But once you divert, once you’re no longer even trying to test it by Scripture, you’re really in deep, deep trouble.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right. Yes?

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Participant: It brings to mind the Scripture where people come to Christ in the latter days, saying, “We cast out demons and did all these things in Your name.” He says, “Go away; I never knew you.”

Jeff: Yes. It’s interesting, because that is a particularly interesting text, because He’s talking about righteousness in the beginning, and about our righteousness exceeding the Scribes and the Pharisees. And these come to him with major sign gifts saying, “We know you.” And He’s saying, “I don’t know you.” It’s an interesting contrast.

Okay. Thanks very much. We should pray. Let’s pray. Father in heaven, we are thankful that You have revealed Yourself in Your word, and You’ve given that to us for our comfort and good. And we’re thankful, Father, that Your Holy Spirit continues to work, and we’re mindful of that. And yet we know that You’ve told us and You’ve instructed us to give Your word primacy and to test all things by it. We ask, Lord, that You will continue to knit our hearts to the Scriptures. Help us, Lord, to love them more, not because we’re committing idolatry by worshiping the Bible, but because we’re seeing and knowing it as it is in truth Your word. So Father, thank You for this. And we pray it in Christ’s name. Amen.

Men: Amen. (*Applause*)