

# The Extraordinary in the Ordinary

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## THE UNOPENED GIFT: WISDOM

We have begun a series about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We've already seen that the gifts are given to build up the church – to build the house of God. Paul has said that they are given for the common good. They are essentially gifts given to the community, they are not gifts given primarily for the individual. Perhaps this is the greatest challenge to us in our post-modern way of thinking and it is easily lost on us. These gifts are given primarily for the benefit of the community. I've been thinking about this over the last couple of weeks and how it seems to have strong parallels with going on the geo-cache walk for XRhythms.

The Geo-cache walk was great for community: the kids would zoom off, looking for treasure buried under a bush or tree; some adults had to help – giving directions and guidance as to where to look; most of the adults wandered along – following the path a safe distance behind. The group stayed together – we waited for the slower ones so we could search together for hidden treasure. For it to be a success certain things had to happen:

- someone had to lead, guide and direct
- the fast ones could run ahead, but would then have to wait
- the slower ones could be slower, but still had to keep moving and not lose the ones ahead
- the adults sacrificed the thrill of finding the treasure so that the children could enjoy it
- those who could have gone faster didn't.

There were all sorts of dynamics going on. If you'd said to me afterwards – did you enjoy the exercise ... I'd have said: "That wasn't exercise, I'd need to go to the gym and swim 80 lengths to get exercise." My point is this: what I might do on my own is not necessarily what I do when I'm in community – community will probably require me to make sacrifices. Friends, so with worship in community - gifts are given for the common good, for building up.

An important question here is why do we need the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Why does CBC need the gifts of the Spirit today? Perhaps the clue comes in 1 Corinthians 13. I Corinthians 13, 8-10 reads: "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. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears."

Paul says that when perfection comes the gifts will cease. That is because we won't need them because we will fully know (as he goes on to say in V12.) What he seems to mean is this: perfection comes when Christ returns and then, in the new heaven and the new earth, the gifts will no longer be necessary, because the gifts are an imperfect means of knowing God. The gifts are God's presents to the church to equip us until he comes again. When he returns – we won't need them because we will fully know God

as he has always intended. The gifts have been given to us for the “in between time” for the “now” to the “not yet”.

The gifts are given for us to see better, to understand better and to grow in Christ. So, we need not be afraid of the gifts, but we should be willing to embrace them as God’s gracious help as we seek to live for him and serve him in the “in between times.”

If we had written about the spiritual gifts and put them in order, I wonder what would have been top of the list. You may have heard this rather amusing, yet very accurate joke:

‘Now these three remain; faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is tongues.’

Paul puts tongues at the end of the list of gifts and he puts wisdom at the top. Perhaps that was because the use of the gifts, and particularly gifts like tongues, was causing division in the Corinthian church. Where is wisdom more needed than in the exercise of the gift of the Spirit? What do you think is ‘the word of wisdom?’ Ok – I’m going to get you to think a bit now! I’m going to read some of John Chapter 4. This is a passage often used to show what wisdom is, so as I read look for where you think Jesus might use the gift of wisdom.

John 4 v 4 – 26 reads: “Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?”

Are you greater than our Father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?” Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is

spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.” The woman said “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.””

So.. What do you think? Talk to each other!

Wisdom is often said to be the application of a word of knowledge. The word of knowledge is said to be a divine insight into hidden facts or facets of a person or situation. So in this, Jesus receives a word of knowledge about the woman – she has had five husbands and is living with another man. He then exercises the word of wisdom by teaching her about worshipping God.

For Paul though, the word of wisdom is more than application, or ‘how’ to apply what God has said to a particular situation. The word of wisdom in Greek is ‘Logos Sophias’ – ‘Logos’ translates as message or utterance – so the gift is about inspired speech. But what kind of speech? ‘Sophia’ refers to divine wisdom rather than intellectual wisdom. So Paul sees the word of wisdom as something to do with the wisdom of God as well as speaking to build up the church. For Paul God’s wisdom is really the story of salvation.

1 Corinthians 1 v 18-25 reads: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For, since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”

He goes on to talk about the fact that this wisdom was hidden but has now been made known by the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2 v 6-16 reads: “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot

understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgments: for who has known the mind of the Lord that he instructs him. But we have the mind of Christ."

So for Paul wisdom is the whole of salvation history - God's greatest dream. For Paul, God's wisdom is the mystery that has been made known. He loves you, because he loves you, because he loves you..... That is the wisdom of God. The word of wisdom then is revelation into the mystery of God – his secret redemptive purposes in history.

To some the cross is foolishness, but to believers:

- The cross is a picture of violence, but the key to peace,
- A picture of suffering, yet the key to healing
- A picture of death, yet the key to life
- A picture of weakness, yet the key to power
- A picture of capital punishment, yet the key to mercy and forgiveness
- A picture of vicious hatred, yet the key to love
- A picture of supreme shame, yet the Christian's supreme boast<sup>1</sup>

So for Paul, wisdom is a revelation of God's mysterious general purposes for people. There is also a practical outworking of the gift of wisdom. An example of the two working together as the word of wisdom comes in John chapter 8 – the woman caught in adultery. The Pharisees say the law says the woman should be stoned and they ask Jesus 'What do you say?' Now if Jesus lets her go – he will be accused of being lawless. If, on the other hand he condemns her, he will be accused of being loveless. So knowing and understanding God's dream, his great plan of salvation, that humans are fallen and sinful, but knowing there is forgiveness and freedom, Jesus exercises the word of wisdom. Interestingly his first response is to pause – he draws in the sand (we don't know what – but that's not important.) Then he says: "Let anyone of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." When they've all left her, Jesus speaks words of affirmation and acceptance: "Neither do I condemn you!" In a word of compassion he extends God's forgiveness but then he tells her to leave her life of sin. His wisdom: he will not exercise compassion without morality; nor will he teach morality without compassion. This is a wonderful reflection of his father's heart without ignoring the reality of sin.

The word of wisdom is a charismatic disclosure of divine truth from the Holy Spirit. That truth relates both to belief, usually administered in teaching (like now I hope!) and to behaviour. Paul's teaching on the gifts is about 'how' they should be used in the church!

So who should have the gift of wisdom? Well .... we should all desire it. How do you discern when a word of wisdom is a word of wisdom? If a word of wisdom is truly a word of wisdom it will reveal truths about salvation, it will centre on the truth of Jesus and his life, death and resurrection. A word of wisdom will glorify the Lord Jesus; and the whole truth of his life. A true word of wisdom will never promote the one who speaks it - the messenger! A word of wisdom will always be shared in Calvary love by the one speaking it, and it will have the effect of encouraging and strengthening the body of Christ. And it will encourage behaviour that is consistent with biblical, kingdom ethics. So the word of

wisdom is the speaking of an insight into God's purposes – his plan of salvation or his plan for his church or an individual. It is primarily a teaching gift but the apostle James wrote: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

Let us eagerly desire the word or gift of wisdom.

1. Stibbe M, *Know Your Spiritual Gifts*, Zondervan 4004 ed.

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May by Rev. Ian Phillips.