

# SERMON: THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

## INTRODUCTION

I want to begin today by looking back to a very important point made last week by James in his sermon introducing the spiritual gifts. James said that the spiritual gifts that we find outlined in the New Testament find their foundation in the Old Testament. So, it is crucially important, when taking the time that we are to study the spiritual gifts, to do so in a holistic sense searching for its foundations within both the testaments.

Today we look at the gifts of knowledge and wisdom two gifts which have a particular rich history within our scriptures. They are also two of the gifts which seem the most obscure mostly because they have been misunderstood to be the same thing, or because they have been called by the name of a different spiritual gift.

But these two gifts are exactly that, two gifts, each with its own history from within the Old Testament and the new. My hope is that by looking at the distinctiveness of these two gifts that we are able to realise their full potential not only within the scriptures that we read, but within our own lives and the ministry of the church today.

## THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

### INTRODUCTION

I want to begin by looking at the gift of knowledge. Broadly speaking the gift of knowledge can be described as the ability to speak or articulate well the things of God. Today, it can commonly be called the teaching gift, the ability to communicate in today's world the message of Jesus in such a way that others come to understand His message. This gift is often found in those called to be priests, deacons, evangelists. But it can also be said that this gift is given to those who are religious studies teachers, or anyone of us who proclaims the name of Jesus. Now it is important at this point to also say that this is a gift, meaning that not everyone possess it and it is not an absolute necessity that someone should have this gift if they are a priest, deacon, evangelist, etc. I think the best way to say this is that it is not necessary, but it is handy. It does not confirm any particular ministry, but it does inform a ministry should we possess it.

### MOSES AS OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

So where do we begin when looking at this gift within the scriptures. Well, I would suggest we look at the life of Moses. In Exodus Ch. 4 Moses is met by the burning bush and God calls him to be His messenger for the liberation of Israel. Moses gives him a number of different reasons why He has the wrong guy but then finishes with this. <sup>10</sup> **But Moses said to the Lord,**

**“O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.”<sup>11</sup>**

Have a look how God responds. **Then the Lord said to him, “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?<sup>12</sup> Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak<sup>1</sup>**

This dialogue is the first example of the gifts of knowledge being clearly given and it is wonderful, because it does not just say ‘and God gave him speech’. No, rather it brings out two very vital and important things about this gift.

First God asks, where does the gift come from? He declares to Moses, “look I am the one who has made you, I made the mouth you now refuse to declare me with, If I give you the commission to proclaim then I will be with you and will enable you to do it”. The first thing therefore to remember is that the gift comes from God. This is important to remember because I believe that with every gift that we are given by God there is also a coinciding temptation presented to us by the enemy. For the gift of knowledge this temptation is pride, arrogance. It is a common temptation for those who are eloquent in speech, for those who are able to preach and teach. Big head syndrome is real. And it comes in the moment we forget to give the glory to the one who had provided the gift. It comes when we desire to be seen as eloquent, seen as clever, seen as a great preacher, teacher, evangelist, etc. rather than giving the glory to God.

Secondly, God says that he will give to Moses the words to say and will instruct him what to teach. So, we know that not only does God give the gift he is present in the acting out of this gift. And this is partly how we know that this moment with Moses is the ancestor of the spiritual gift of knowledge we have today, why? Because just as God is with Moses as he teaches, so also God is present through the Holy Spirit with all those he gives the ability to teach today. Moses for his mission with the Israelites requires real presence, and the same is true today, as we engage with the gift of knowledge we do so in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Let’s look at the end result. Deuteronomy Ch. 1 tells us that Moses sat down <sup>5</sup> **Beyond the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law<sup>2</sup>** and earlier in verse 1 **<sup>1</sup>These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan—in the wilderness,**

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (1993). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ, p. Ex 4:10–12.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (1993). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ, p. Dt 1:5.

**on the plain**<sup>3</sup>. God gave Moses, the man who was not eloquent, who was unable to speak well to people or in front of people the ability write down the law, and to then teach it to the people of Israel. can you see the change? It is the change brought about by the gifting given by God and carried out in his presence, guiding the mouth and what it teaches.

## THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we reach the New Testament we see again, even before the events of Pentecost evidence of the gift of knowledge being found. Most notable we see this when a debate erupts between Jesus and his disciples. In Matthew on their way to Caesarea Philippi Jesus asks his disciples ‘who do people say the son of man is.’ Many answers come back, **Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.**<sup>15</sup> **He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”** and then <sup>16</sup>**Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**<sup>17</sup><sup>4</sup>.

Again, listen how Jesus responds **Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven**<sup>5</sup>. We find here the same characteristics that we see within the story of Moses, a revelation from Jesus that it was indeed God who revealed this to special knowledge to Peter. And of course, it was this same peter who, when filled with the holy spirit was given the eloquence of speech to speak out, as Moses once did, over the people of Israel on the day of Pentecost and many thousands understood and gave their lives to the Lord.

So, the gift of knowledge both given and guided by God, gives us the ability to speak eloquently and with clarity about the things of God, in such a way that it blesses those who hear it with understanding.

## THE GIFT OF WISDOM

### THE GIFT OF WISDOM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The gift of Wisdom shares with the gift of knowledge the reward of a great history. If fact the history of the gift of wisdom begins even before the gift of knowledge, at the start of creation. A great Eastern Orthodox Theologian suggests that Wisdom begins as a characteristic of God just like his grace, mercy and love. It was this divine wisdom which is first seen as the breath of God uttering in creation. Wisdom was therefore the thought that

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#) (1993). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ, p. Dt 1:1.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (2016). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, p. Mt 16:14–17.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (2016). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, p. Mt 16:17.

was put into our creation. When we refer to the conception of a child for example, we say they were once a twinkle in their parent's eye, so it is with wisdom.

But we learn pretty early on within the Old Testament That wisdom is not only a quality held by God, it is also one which he produces within us. In 1 kings 3 God appears to Solomon in a dream. Pleased with his dedication to Him, God wishes to give to this king anything he wishes. Solomon almost without hesitation says this **“your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”**<sup>6</sup> And so in this moment God gives to Solomon what he asks for and the first gift of Wisdom is imparted.

The following passage in this story then sees Solomon applying that wisdom. Two mothers are brought to him and he had to make the decision who was the true mother of this baby in dispute. Solomon made a decision in this case and the decision became famous why? **Because all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him**<sup>7</sup> The gift of wisdom given to Solomon was not just what we might consider 'earthly wisdom' being clever, having good instincts or common sense. Rather God gives to Solomon his own wisdom and it is the use of this gift that allows Solomon to discern the right and just way to deal with the dispute in front of him.

So, wisdom is present at creation, and a gift of God's own wisdom is given to Solomon. But we also find within the Old Testament a series of books dedicated outlining the deep desire we should all have for attaining this wisdom ourselves, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes We do not have time here to go into all of this but what these books reveal to us is that wisdom is woven into our existence as human beings, as created beings of God. Wisdom is present for us when we make good and sensible decision for our lives. When we make bad decisions, we are working against wisdom.

The question therefore arises; if wisdom is woven into who we are at creation why did Solomon asked for it? Well Solomon, in asking for wisdom, in reality asks for a greater awareness of the presence of wisdom in his daily life, an oversensitivity to wisdom we might say, or it may be that he is asking for an increase of the wisdom that existed within our created selves. Either option is possible.

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<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (1993). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ, p. 1 Ki 3:8–9.

<sup>7</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (1993). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ, p. 1 Ki 3:28.

The result of this asking is the same. God's wisdom, woven into our creation implicitly becomes an explicit reality, something that moves from the depths of who we are to the forefront of our lives, existing in plain sight.

And so, we leave the Old Testament having met wisdom as part of the force of creation, woven into us as part of our making. Solomon, in asking for Wisdom releases the full potential of the gift of wisdom by making it front and center to the way he ran his life. As we enter the New Testament therefore, we begin to see the gift of wisdom developing the characteristics of what we have come to call a spiritual gift.

## GIFT OF WISDOM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we, once again reach the New Testament we reach a different place in time and a different mission to that of the Old Testament. But Wisdom, as a characteristic of God woven into his creation remains the same. We do however start to see a difference as to how wisdom is applied, and the gift practiced.

It is still the case that the gift of wisdom is the act of bringing the implicit wisdom of God to the front and center of our lives. Not only is wisdom present within our everyday decisions, it is also present within our interactions with one another, more specifically those moments where God chooses to impart information to us that was not previously known for the purpose of providing some form of ministry to the individual or group. Today we would call this a word of wisdom. It is that moment where we may feel particularly sensitive to the working of the Holy Spirit. With Wisdom giving us our grounding we begin to understand things about the moment, people, places, situations not known to us before, and we then feel an urge to bring that to the attention of an individual or group.

Let me ground this in scripture. John Ch. 4 Jesus travelling through Samaria met a woman at the well in the heat of the day. A dialogue began between them both when Jesus asked her for water. Jesus, using this conversation to reach a particular spiritual point tells the woman to **"go get her husband"**. She said **"sir, I have no husband"**. He said to her, **"You have well said that you have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and the man you are now with is not your husband"**. She said **"Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet"**. True enough, but the incident more accurately represented a "Word of Knowledge". It did not warn, give direction or tell the future. It only exposed a truth.

The gift of wisdom, or a word of wisdom exposes truth that is needed to be found in order that a person or a situation may experience a deeper relationship with the Lord. Now I mentioned earlier that for every Spiritual gift there is also a temptation. What is the temptation for wisdom? It is the temptation to be what I call a word of wisdom machine gun. To call out everything we get before testing it first, discerning it with the Lord, reflecting on its grounding in scripture.

When we receive a word of wisdom or something that we believe to be a word of wisdom, we must also use this wisdom within ourselves to ask the Lord for who this word might be. Is it an individual or the whole group? Is it for now or for later? is it something that could be potentially painful, in which case is it not wise to wait until a leader within the community can test and share it with you? It may sound we are doubting the spiritual gift that the Holy spirit is placing within us but I would say instead that we are appropriately stewarding it.

## CONCLUSION

We need to appropriately steward the gifts that the Lord produces within us. We need to be able to place them, as we have done today within the context of scripture, to be confident enough to take time to test it, question it with the Spirit. As we do that, we purify what God is communicating with us to a more precious form, because we place around it a scriptural safeguard, and when necessary a safeguard of testing by those God has called to lead the family of God.

So, I hope today that I have managed to reflect to you the distinctiveness of these two spiritual gifts, gifts which so commonly either get mistaken for one another, or from something else entirely like prophecy. I hope that we have managed to ground these gifts in scripture and see within this their holistic nature, drawing on the history of both the Old Testament and the new. God uses these gifts powerfully within our worship today, as he has done so throughout our history as the people of God.

But what is perhaps most important is that these gifts represent the giving of God himself to those who are his people weaving in them the tools to tell out good news of Jesus, and to aid those in need of deeper relationship with him. He provides for us through these gifts the ability join in with the work God is doing today being those who make disciples of all nations in the name of Jesus our Lord.

Amen