

Sunday School Lesson January 31, 2021

Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.

Lesson for January 31, 2021, "Prophesying Daughters"

Background Scriptures from Luke 2:36-38, Acts 1:12-14, 2:16-21, and 21:8-9.

The lists of spiritual gifts in the Apostle Paul's letters indicate that spiritual gifts are poured out on all believers, but different people receive different gifts. All Christians are called to serve others, but some people have a spiritual gift for service. They serve easily and often. Acts of service are natural and comfortable to them because the Holy Spirit has gifted them that way. In the same way, all Christians are called to pay attention to what God is showing them and to speak up as appropriate. Some Christians have the gift of prophecy. They easily see God's hand at work.

Our service to God should continue as long as we are physically able to serve (Luke 2:36-37). We should thank and praise God constantly for being our redemption (Luke 2:38). The Scriptures should be the basis for our witnessing for Jesus Christ (Acts 2:16-20). It is our duty as believers to proclaim that anyone who confesses faith in Jesus Christ will have eternal life (Acts 2:21; John 3:16). God calls all kinds of people, both male and female to proclaim His gospel message (Acts 21:8-9).

Gina had enjoyed the company of elderly folks since she was a child. Now, as an adult, Gina worked taking care of them. She had seen so much heartache. The physical suffering was bad enough, but it was the emotional suffering like abandonment and loneliness that hurt them the most. In the past year, there had been several elderly folks in Gina's church who had succumbed to poor health and were no longer able to attend services. Gina genuinely missed seeing their faces in church on Sunday morning. She began to pray for the folks she missed, and the more she prayed, the greater her burden became. Her burden began to expand beyond the boundaries of her church and extended to the elderly folks who needed to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit was at work in Gina's heart. Surely she wasn't the only one in her church who saw the need for outreach in this area. Gina spoke with her pastor, and with his prayer and support, she launched a visitation and outreach program for the elderly in her community. The outreach team found that some of the elderly folks wanted to hear nothing about a Savior or the gift of salvation. They began to pray that the Holy Spirit would soften

those hardened hearts and that He would empower them in their ministry. One by one, lost souls were led to Christ, not only the elderly but their family members and caregivers as well.

This story illustrates how the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, at work in one faithful heart, can reach out to the lost, hurting souls and unite a community.

As mentioned in earlier Sunday school lessons, women like Sarah, Hannah, Ruth, Rahab, and Mary, acted in faith, love, and hope. Their faithfulness occurred in a culture of patriarchy. Women possessed little power. Women in the Old Testament, under the Spirit's power, stepped up, crossed over, and spoke with love and truth. Our lesson today begins by noting Anna's prophesy. Anna was an elderly woman approximately 85-90 years old. After the loss of her husband, she devoted her life to worshipping and praying in the temple. If we were searching for someone to proclaim a prophetic word, it would not be Anna. She was a woman and we already know that women had little power and held little authority. Our culture would judge her too old for such an important task. However, God sees what we never see. Anna would not be educated. Women had to sit apart in the synagogue and were not allowed to teach or ask questions until they were home. The Lord almost always chooses those the world never considers.

Prophecy isn't always future-telling. There is far more prophecy that addresses the present. Prophecy was offered by those who perceived the current culture through the eyes of covenant. They held God's plumb line as a measure of Israel's character. The plumb line was the Covenant. Prophecy examined the culture by asking, "Where do we stand in relationship to God and the Law?" The prophet speaks truth to falsehood.

The prophet is always called of God. They often introduce their prophesy with, "The word of the Lord came." The introduction employed by the prophets infers the prophet wanted people to know their words did not originate from them, but from God.

From the text section, Women Who Prophecy, Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 when he addressed the crowd after the strange events on the day of Pentecost. This describes the "last days", Joel saw as being characterized by the presence of the Holy Spirit in all people, including sons and daughters, the young and the old. All people will see God at work and be able to speak about it. Anyone male, female, young, old can be called to be prophet.

Joel's words describe what he sees about God's future, and we stand in the middle of his prophecy. The first verses, Acts 2:17-18, describe the day of

Pentecost, which is in the past for us. The next verses, Acts:19-20, describe what Joel sees about events that are in the future for us, the "great and terrible day of the Lord", when God will bring judgment and the creation will reflect God's drama.

The Kingdom did come as Jesus ushered it in with his life, death, and resurrection. We have been living in God's Kingdom for generations. Still, there is coming a day when Jesus will usher in the Kingdom in all of its glory as the new heaven and new earth are established. Prior to Pentecost, the Spirit rested upon a select few. Pentecost was the pouring out of the Spirit on all Christians. As new Christians, filled with the Spirit, we walk forward in God's unfolding Kingdom. We bear the attributes of the Kingdom, like love, mercy, grace, light, and peace. Our life is to serve as a window through which others may see God and his Kingdom.

Joel was allowed to proclaim what is to come. The Spirit and the signs of the Kingdom would fall upon God's people. It would touch and use young and old, male, and female. We would understand our past, to find meaning in the present, and have the vision to see where we are going.

Part of our lesson passage includes Luke 2:36-38, which the prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, is mentioned.

In the Old Testament, four women are designated as being prophetesses: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), and the unnamed wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3). Though their words are not recorded at length like those of Moses or Jeremiah, these women served in the same ways by communicating what God revealed to them for the people to hear.

The mention of Anna's father, Phanuel, suggests that he was a well-remembered resident of Jerusalem as Luke wrote this account. His name means "face of God," or "presence of God." This implies his religious dedication, a faithfulness that was passed down to his daughter. Fittingly, his daughter would see God face-to-face when she met the baby Jesus. The tribe of Asher was one of the ten northern tribes destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Though many were taken into captivity at that time, others were left behind. Some became the people known as Samaritans through intermarriage with non-Israelites. Anna's family apparently was left in the land but did not intermarry with other peoples, thus remaining recognizably as being from a tribe.

Anna was a praying woman. She entered the Temple regularly to worship and pray. Anna was near the end of her life, yet she was called to proclaim a

new beginning. Her heart reached toward God in prayer while God was reaching for Anna to speak an answer to all seeking the Messiah.

Anna is empowered to recognize the baby Jesus as the Messiah. Her prophecy is not wordy and is rather short. However, it gives the reason behind all other reasons. What is more important than to recognize that Jesus is Messiah? Jesus has joined our life, dwelled in our heart, and even now is redeeming all things in heaven and earth.

From the text section, Prophets as Seers. The New Testament, only a few women are said to have the gift of prophecy: Anna and Philip's four daughters. In part, this is because after the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, all people, male, female, young and old, have the capacity to see what God is up to and to speak about it. According to the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit brings specific gifts to believers, and the gift of prophecy is described in lists of spiritual gifts. Paul makes no distinction between men and women in the lists of gifts.

Acts 21:7-9 says, "We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied."

These verses tell us a man named Philip who housed Paul and company while he was in Caesarea. This man had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.

Philip was chosen to do the work of a deacon because of certain qualities in his character. The men chosen were to have a reputation of honesty, wisdom and a desire for the spiritual. Since they were to be making arrangements for the care of others, some sort of leadership ability and a desire to work were probably considered as well.

The first part of Acts chapter 8 tells of Philip preaching in Samaria after Saul began persecuting Christians in earnest. Remember, that the Jews considered the Samaritans worse than dogs. Jews who had married Gentiles resettled in Canaan by the Assyrians after the defeat of the northern kingdom of Israel became known as Samaritans. This did not seem to matter to Philip. He, like Jesus, was concerned enough for their souls to put away prejudice in order to teach salvation. We have no way of knowing for sure, but Philip was probably well off. He was able to support a household of at least four daughters, travel, and provide for Paul and his companions.

From what I found Acts chapter 21 is the only mention of Philip's four daughters in the Bible. The few words paint a good picture. All four girls were unmarried and living in their father's household. We do not know an exact age of these daughters. In Acts 2:17, Peter quotes the prophet Joel (2:28-29). The verse tells of a time when gifts of a miraculous nature would be given. The gift of prophecy is specifically mentioned. It was to be given to men and women, servants and free. The purpose of these gifts was to confirm the Word of God, to help those who saw or heard, know the message was from God and to be obeyed. In the New Testament, when a person received a miraculous gift, it was given to a Christian (Acts 8:17), with the exception at the household of Cornelius where such a gift was received immediately before conversion to confirm that Gentiles were subject to the Gospel, too (Acts 10-11). In every case of conversion, the new Christian was old enough to understand he was a sinner and needed to obey God in order to be rid of his sins. With this in mind, it seems that Philip's daughters were Christians and old enough to know right from wrong. The scriptures say Philip's daughters "did prophesy."

The main purpose of the New Testament prophets (and prophetesses), was not to predict. In the New Testament the job of the prophets was to reveal what men could not know without supernatural help. The gift of prophecy was given so the early church could know God's plan for salvation and how they must live in order to be pleasing to God. Remember that in the early days of the church there was not a written Word, or Bible, as we know it. It was necessary for God to reveal his will through a prophet or prophetess.

Philip's daughters had a very special, God given purpose. They fulfilled their obligation to teach others in a unique way. We must use the tools available to us. Look around and see all the things we can do to serve the Lord. Choose how you will serve God and give it your best. Be faithful Christian men and women like the daughters of Philip.

From the text section, Stepping into the World. The best advice I have heard for someone with the gift of prophecy is that the central call of the prophet today is to see and then pray, to ask God if speaking up is appropriate or not, and if so, in what setting and with which words. Truly, today God continues to pour out the Holy Spirit on young and old, and on men and women, so both men and women can prophesy as called by God and guided by the Spirit.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson February 7, 2021, "Called to Evangelize"

Background Scripture John 1:37-51 and John 4:25-42.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, Lectionary Bible Studies, by John W. Arthur, The Teacher's Bible Commentary, H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs, Editors, New Testament Prophet Notes, by Elder Gerald A. Jones, and The Present Word.