

St. Mary's Sermon Series

Deuteronomy 32:1-12

Spiritual Gifts - Conclusion

For a minute or two I want us to imagine a scene where we are high up in the mountains and, as we look out we can see a nest perched on a very tiny ledge. It's quite a large, untidy eagle's nest made of twigs. As we look closer we can see the nest is occupied by a mother eagle and her two baby eaglets – it's quite normal for eagles to have two babies. The baby eagles have grown considerably since they were first born and now they are fully feathered.

One day the mother eagle does a very strange thing. She starts chasing one of her babies (just for the sake of it we'll call him little Johnny eagle) all around the nest, pushing him closer and closer to the edge until eventually the inevitable happens and little Johnny eagle topples out of the nest and starts falling to the ground. Little baby Johnny eagle doesn't know how to fly so he just starts to hurtle down to the ground. Until now little Johnny eagle had not appreciated just how high up their nest was. Little Johnny eagle thinks to himself, "I wonder why she did that, she has never done anything like that before. Well, it has been a very short life. It won't be long now before it comes to an end. I wonder if God will look after me up there in heaven, after all I haven't done anything wrong . . .?" and then all of a sudden, from out of nowhere, just as he was about to hit the ground with an almighty thud, mother eagle swoops down underneath him and catches him on her wings and carries him back to the safety of the nest. "Phew!" he thinks to himself, "that was a close shave." Once he gets his breath back and his mother has gone off to find food he relates his amazing adventure to his brother, little Joey eagle. You don't believe me do you? Well it's true.

The next day mother eagle's it at it again. This time little Johnny is ready; he thinks to himself, "There's no way that I'm going through all that again, after all, next time I might not be so lucky, mother eagle might not catch me." So he is very relieved when, this time, his mother kicks his brother out of the nest. Johnny waits anxiously to see if his mother is able to catch Joey and bring him back to the nest just as she had done with him. And sure enough, a few minutes later, they arrive back at the nest safe and sound with little Joey eagle looking as white as a sheet, despite being warned what to expect by his brother.

What both Johnny and Joey had failed to appreciate, while they were falling helplessly to the ground, was that their mother had been hovering just out of sight, waiting for the right moment to swoop down and catch them. Over the next few days and weeks this process continued. The young ones start to enjoy their new game safe in the knowledge that their mother would always catch them. Eventually they begin to think, "Hang on a minute! There is nobody to catch our mother. How does she get back to the nest?" Soon they realised that it must have something to do with her wings and so they start to experiment with their own wings. They discover that they are able to flap their wings and so they start to try to fly for

themselves. At first they are not very successful, but eventually they get the hang of it and are able to find their own way back to the nest without the help of their mother.

You still don't believe me do you? Well it is true. This is exactly how eagles teach their young to fly. It was right there in our reading. Look at verse 11.

Why have I shared this picture with you this morning? I'm sure there are many things that we could learn from this beautiful passage, but it seems to me that the way God teaches us to use spiritual gifts is exactly the same way that eagles teach their young to fly. He puts a thought or a picture in our minds and we have to take Him at his word and step out in faith. Over the last few weeks, during the course of our sermon series we have learnt a lot of theory about spiritual gifts and now it is time to put the theory into practice. Remember Jesus words, "Blessed are those who hear my words and obey them" Luke 11:28

It would be very easy to conclude that it was great to have learnt a lot more about the spiritual gift and to simply forget all about it. It is even possible to believe that the spiritual gifts are available to be used today but think that God could not possible give me a spiritual gift. This is also why at the moment our house groups are doing a course by John Ortberg with the strange title, "If you want to walk on water you have to get out of the boat." I know I've said this many times before but John Wimber use to spell faith as "R" "I" "S" "K"!

God does not suddenly "zap" us and all of a sudden we have a mature spiritual gift. Rather, He gives us the first line of a prophecy and, although we ask him to give us the rest, He does not. Only when we are prepared to step out in faith and say, "I think God might be saying . . .", does He give us the rest. In practice this means that operating in the gifts of the spirit is a learning process and there will be times when we get it wrong; when what we thought were inspired words from God turn out to be no more than our own hot air! I want to say that that is perfectly ok and is nothing to worry about - if we have shared it in the correct way and allowed others to discern whether or not it is genuinely from God. If it is not inspired by the Holy Spirit everyone will simply forget all about it and no damage will be done.

It might feel a little scary, as though we are completely out of our depth and certain to fall flat on our face, but if we are genuinely seeking to do God's will we can be confident that underneath are the everlasting arms and he will not let us fall. As we step out in faith we learn to trust God and realise that He is utterly reliable and trustworthy. In fact the only way we learn is from our mistakes. The only time we ever completely fail is if we are not prepared to try at all.

This is the final sermon in our series looking at the gifts of the spirit. From the feedback that I have received from both parishes I know that you have found the talks helpful. I want to conclude this sermon this morning and the series with a couple of reminders: -

Firstly, that what we have looked at in this series is not an exhaustive list of the all gifts of the spirit.

As I said at the start of the series, I chose to look at the list of gifts in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, but there are other lists which, as well as the gifts we have looked at, also include other gifts that we have not focused upon. The gifts that we have looked at tend to be the more sensationalist, charismatic gifts and we have omitted the more ordinary run of the mill gifts which are, in fact, none the less spiritual gifts. In particular I am thinking about the gifts of helpful deeds, the gift of mercy and of teaching.

Mark Stibbe highlights the importance of the gift of helping others by referring to the story of the four men who carried their paralysed friend to Jesus. They took him onto the roof, cut a hole in it and lowered him down in front of Jesus. Mark says that he has heard many sermons on this passage (Mark ch. 2) which have all focused on how Jesus operated in the gifts of the spirit by demonstrating:- Faith, by recognising that the atmosphere was conducive for a miracle and prophecy as he saw beyond the man's physical symptoms to his real need for forgiveness of sin. Discernment of a critical spirit on the part of the religious leaders and finally, healing as he restored the man to full health.

Mark also says, "It is a sobering fact that, in all the sermons I have heard on this story, I can never remember hearing anyone applaud the stretcher bearers for their gift of helpful deed. Yet if they had not been prepared to exercise that gift, the great healing event which followed would never have occurred." (Know your spiritual gifts page 193)

Secondly, I was listening to an excellent recording by Bill Johnson yesterday in which he came to the conclusion that the reason why all the previous revivals had fizzled out was because they had failed to give the blessing away and kept it within the confines of the church. It is the principle of the parable of the talents. We need to learn to give away the blessings that God gives to us - whether that blessing is forgiveness, financial or spiritual. When we give them away we don't lose them but in fact gain the capacity to receive further blessing.

So, as you have listened to/read these sermons, which gifts have you thought, "I'd really like to have that gift? I wish God would give me the gift of faith or the gift of words of knowledge or healing?"

It might just be that God has given you that desire. Pray and ask him to give you the gift so that you can use it for his glory and go on asking him until either he gives you the gift or tells you that the gift is not for you. And, even though it might seem a bit bizarre, look for opportunities to minister in that gift.