

Revelation of Jesus - The work of the Spirit

'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (Rev19:10) - it is revelation that convinces of the Lordship of Jesus.

'...if the whole church comes together [and] an unbeliever or someone who doesn't understand comes in while everyone is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God exclaiming, "God is really among you!"' (1Cor 14:24-25)

a) THE GOSPELS

The calling of the first disciples (Matt 4:18-22, Mk 1:14-20, Lk 5:1-11, Jn 1:35-42)

Matthew and Mark's accounts describe the call of Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John to leave their jobs as fishermen and follow Jesus essentially full time. There is some history behind this call. Luke's account precedes this and is the description of Jesus' revelation to them about where they could catch fish. He told them to fish in the same place they had been fishing all night with no success, but to put the net on the other side of the boat. (He knew where they had been fishing and from which side of the boat). Peter's response is just like 1 Cor 14:25, 'he fell at Jesus' knees and said "Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man"'. Jesus had previously also healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law and (Lk 4:38-39) and taught from Simon's boat (Lk 5:3), which is presumably why Peter was prepared to take Jesus' instruction (Lk 5:5), even though Jesus was obviously not a fisherman. John tells us that John the Baptist revealed Jesus as the Messiah to Andrew (Jn 1:35-37, 40) and he went and brought his brother Simon to Jesus (Jn 1:41-42). It was at this time that Jesus gave Simon the nickname 'Peter', based on his knowledge of Simon's character. This event probably predates all of the above.

The man let down through the roof (Matt 9:1-8, Mk 2:1-11, Lk 5:18-26)

Jesus forgave the man's sin rather than immediately healing him. He knew this is what was needed, sin was at the base of the illness. Later, when teachers criticised, Jesus 'knew their thoughts'.

The woman with bleeding (Matt 9:20-22, Mk 5:25-34, Lk 8:43-48)

Jesus knew that the woman had touched him and that power had gone out from him even though he was being jostled by the crowd.

The rich young man (Matt 19:16-22, Mk 10:17-22, Lk 18:18-30)

Jesus knew that this man's problem was not wealth (which could be seen) but love of wealth, which is a problem of the heart.

Jesus anointed by a sinful woman (Lk 7:36-50)

A 'woman who had lived a sinful life', probably of prostitution came to Jesus when he was at the house of Simon the Pharisee. She was weeping and her tears wet his feet. She wiped them with her hair and anointed his feet with expensive ointment (purchased with her ill-gotten wealth?). Simon 'said to himself, "if this man was a prophet he would know what sort of woman this was"'. Jesus answered him (He knew what Simon was thinking and knew how to answer him) with the parable of the two debtors. She had given Jesus the respect due to a guest which Simon had not.

Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10)

Jesus saw Zacchaeus in the tree trying to see above the crowd and called him by name. Zacchaeus' response is that of a changed man. He believed in Jesus because of the revelation of his name to Jesus.

Philip and Nathaniel (Jn 1:43-51)

Jesus found Philip and Philip went and got Nathaniel. Nathaniel was impressed by the revelation Jesus had about him as 'an Israelite in whom there is nothing false (an Israelite in whom there is no Jacob)' and that Jesus knew he had been sitting under a fig tree.

Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-15)

Jesus answering of questions different from those actually voiced by Nicodemus (v3) may indicate Jesus' knowledge of what Nicodemus was thinking.

The woman at the well (Jn 4:1-30)

Jesus starts this surprising conversation with a fairly mundane request for help in getting a drink of water. He soon reveals that he has supernatural knowledge of the woman's personal life (v16-18). This revelation, along with the direct revelation of who he was (v26) convinced her (v29). As a result, not only did she believe, but so did many other Samaritans (v39).

The man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5:1-30)

Many sick people were at the pool because of the superstition that an angel would stir up the waters and the first person to get in would be healed. Jesus seems to have gone there and singled out one man to be healed, ignoring the rest. The healing probably led to some chaos as others clamoured to be healed but Jesus slipped away. He knew where to find the man later to finish the work off (v14).

The clue to why this should be is in verses 17 and 19. The Father was already working in this man and it was probably this fact that drew Jesus to go to the pool in the first place. Jesus' work was to co-operate with what he knew the Father to be doing.

The woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:3-11)

Jesus' action here shows wisdom from God. Some think that when Jesus wrote on the ground he was writing words or drawing symbols that indicated God-given knowledge of the sins committed by the accusers so that they were convicted of sin and slipped away ashamed. This may not be the case since Jesus' answer alone ('let him who is without sin cast the first stone') was probably enough to prevent any of them taking any action. If any of them had picked up a stone it would indicate to the crowd that this person thought he was without sin. If any sin was known to the bystanders then the stone thrower himself could also be stoned. This was too big a risk to take so they all melted away leaving Jesus alone with the woman. The one who was truly without sin didn't stone her but forgave her.

The man born blind (Jn 9:1-7)

The disciples saw the man begging and asked if his condition was caused by sin and, if so, by whose - his own or his parents'. Jesus' answer is the revelation that sin was not at the root of this man's blindness and that God was at work. His healing would glorify God.

Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44)

When Jesus received the call from Bethany that his friend Lazarus was ill he knew what the outcome would be. He didn't respond straight away but waited two days, presumably until the Father said he should go. By this time Lazarus was dead although Jesus knew that the final outcome would bring joy to Lazarus' sisters and glory to God (verses 4, 11 and 23).

b) ACTS

Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41)

Peter, along with the rest of the eleven, had always had difficulty understanding Jesus' kingship and the meaning of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom, even after Jesus' death and resurrection (Acts 1:6). Here, however, after the coming of the Spirit all becomes clear and the meaning of everything Jesus said and did becomes clear (Acts 2:33, 36). This Spirit-inspired message cut to the heart of the listeners and the Spirit used it to reveal Jesus to many (Acts 2:37).

The cripple at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:1-10)

The man asked for money but Peter had none. Peter 'looked straight at him' and said 'Look at us'. After this he commanded the man to be healed. Presumably in the exchange of looks the Spirit revealed to Peter that the man had faith to be healed.

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-9)

Ananias and Sapphira's lie to the church (that they were giving all the money from the sale of their property to the apostles) is revealed through Peter to the church so that God's judgement is recognised for what it was.

Stephen (Acts 7:54-8:1)

The revelation of Jesus in his glory at Stephen's death was part of the witness to Saul. It was the encouragement Stephen needed to die as Jesus had died (Acts 7:59,60 & Lk 23:46,34, 1Jn 3:2) and start the process of Saul's forgiveness (Jn 20:23).

Philip (Acts 8:26-40)

During a successful mission in Samaria, an angel told Philip to go south to the desert road. Philip obeyed and met the Ethiopian official. the Spirit told Philip to approach him and he was led to preach to this man that God had prepared to receive the good news. The gospel presentation was dead easy since the Ethiopian was reading Is 53 at the time and had a hunger for God (v27). Philip was able to give a presentation of Jesus from the passage the man was reading (presumably himself led by the Spirit). Philip was then taken by the Spirit to Azotus, from where he travelled along the coast to Caesarea. Here he settled, got married and raised his daughters (Acts 21:8,9).

Ananias (Acts 9:10-19)

The Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision and told him to seek out Saul. He told him exactly where Saul was to be found (Judas' house on Straight Street), that Saul was praying and had seen a man called Ananias come to him to heal him (Acts 9:11,12). Ananias was understandably perturbed by this because he knew Saul's reputation as a murder and persecutor of Christians, and he knew of Saul's particular mission to Damascus.

The Lord's command in the vision (v15) is enough for Ananias to overcome his fear and go. God also tells Ananias that he has called Saul to be his apostle to the gentiles and to suffer for him.

Ananias obeys and in ministering to Saul is also shown by God the circumstances of Saul's conversion (v17). He accepts Saul as his brother on the strength of the vision alone and brings healing and anointing for service. Presumably it was Ananias that baptised Saul too (v18).

Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48)

There are so many things in this story. Cornelius was a God-fearing gentile, as were his whole family. He prayed regularly and gave to those in need. He had a very clear vision of an angel when he was praying one afternoon who told him to send for Peter. The angel told him exactly where Peter was to be found (in Joppa, a town about 25 miles down the coast, at Simon the tanner's house. Simon's house was by the sea)

While Cornelius' servants were on their way, Peter was on the roof of the house about lunchtime. He fell into a trance and had a very clear vision of a sheet containing all sorts of animals that Jews were not allowed to eat being lowered down. God commanded him to eat them but Peter refused, even though he was 'released' enough to stay with a tanner (an 'unclean' profession for Jews because they touched dead carcasses). This happened three times and left Peter very confused. At this point the messengers arrived and told Peter why they had come. Peter invited them in as guests - a good start since he shouldn't have eaten with gentiles as a Jew. Perhaps the meaning of the vision was beginning to sink in. Anyway, he had been with Jesus when he had done such things.

Peter then went back with the messengers to Cornelius house which, by this time, was filled with all Cornelius' family and friends. Peter begins by insulting them all by telling them that, as a Jew, he shouldn't really be there. However, when Cornelius explains to Peter for the third time why he sent for him, Peter realises the meaning of the vision. They are all very gracious and Peter begins to tell them about Jesus. While he is still speaking the Holy Spirit falls and they all begin speaking in tongues. The Jewish believers with Peter are amazed but cannot escape the conclusion that the Gospel is also for the gentiles. Cornelius' entire household (and presumably all of his friends) are baptised.

The clarity of the two visions was needed to enable Peter to break through his prejudice and bring the Gospel to this godly gentile household.

Agabus (Acts 11:27-30)

This incident in which Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, predicted a severe famine served to unite the churches across Asia minor because the other churches sent aid to the churches in Judea. Remember that the church in Jerusalem had been decimated by the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1)

Barnabas and Saul sent off (Acts 13:1-4)

During a worship service, while the church was fasting, 'the Holy Spirit said' set apart Barnabas and Saul 'for the work to which I have called them'. In response, the church commissioned them and sent them off. They went down to Seleucia and from there to Cyprus, 'sent on their way by the Holy Spirit'.

Paul and Elymas (Acts 13:8-12)

In Cyprus they came across Elymas, a sorcerer, who held many people in thrall, including the proconsul. Elymas tried to prevent the proconsul responding to Paul's preaching. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit

looked straight at him and told him he was a child of the devil, an enemy of everything that was right. He told him he would be blind. Immediately he was struck blind, a sign which caused the proconsul to believe.

Paul and the crippled man (Acts 14:8-10)

A man crippled from birth listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked at him and 'saw that he had faith to be healed'. Paul called out 'Stand up' and the man was healed.

Paul's vision (Acts 16:9,10)

Paul and his companions travelled from Derbe through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia. They intended to turn north into Bythina but 'the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them'. Continuing on they came to Troas - the end of the road. At this point Paul had a vision during the night of a Macedonian man begging him to 'come over and help us'. The group was immediately obedient to the vision and prepared to sail for Macedonia, concluding that 'God had called us to preach the Gospel to them'.

Lydia (Acts 16:14)

In Macedonia, Paul went to find a place of prayer by the river. Here they met Lydia. Verse 14 says that 'the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message'. She and her household were baptised.

The slave girl (Acts 16:16-18)

As Paul and his companions went each day to the place of prayer by the river they were accosted by a demonised slave girl. The girl earned a lot of money for her owners by fortune-telling, inspired by the demon. The girl shouted 'These men are servants of the Most High God'. She continued this for many days. Paul eventually became 'so troubled in spirit' that he cast the demon out. The girl's owners were upset because they saw their source of income taken away (compare Acts 19:23-27) and stirred up so much trouble that Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten and imprisoned.

Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7)

Paul arriving in Ephesus found 12 disciples but discerned something was amiss - there was no evidence of the Spirit in them. After questioning he discovered that they had only received the baptism of John for repentance and had never heard of the Holy Spirit. He baptised them in the name of Jesus and laid hands on them. The Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

The Sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13-20)

Some Jews drove out evil Spirit in Jesus name without knowing him. They would say 'In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches, come out'. Sceva, the chief priest, had seven sons who were doing this. One day, a Spirit answered them back saying 'I know Jesus and Paul but who are you?' The demonised man jumped on them and overpowered them. He gave them 'such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding'. They tried to use authority without being themselves under authority (Matt 8:9)

Paul's shipwreck (Acts 27:13 - 28:10)

On the voyage to Rome a tremendous storm blew up (Acts 27:13) and the ship was in great danger. Paul, presumably through a word of knowledge, had warned them before they set sail from Fair Havens on Crete that this would happen. However, during the night an angel had appeared to him and assured him that none of the crew would be lost but the ship would be destroyed. When some of the crew tried to leave the ship in

a lifeboat (v31) Paul knew they must stay with the ship to be saved. The centurion by now trusted Paul and cut the lifeboat adrift so that the men had to stay on board. Just before the ship ran aground Paul advised them all to eat so that they would survive (v34). Paul's direction to the crew and their obedience to the revelation God had given saved all of their lives.

c) GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. The clarity and directness of the revelation seems to be related to the magnitude of the obstacles that have to be overcome if God is to be obeyed. In Ananias' vision, the Lord himself spoke and gave him instructions because he was to go to pray for Saul. Ananias was only too aware of who Saul was and what he was doing and a great deal of fear had to be overcome. Peter's vision in Acts 10 was also very clear and repeated for, in this case, Peter had a deep prejudice that had to be overcome before he would obey God and go to Cornelius. Three times Peter said 'No' to God in the course of these visions. Philip had a visitation from an angel to tell him to go out to the desert road to meet the Ethiopian official. Philip was in the middle of leading a great revival in Samaria at the time and would be very reluctant to indulge in a 'wild goose chase'. Stephen's vision of Jesus 'standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7:56) gave him the courage to face death as Jesus had faced death. He became like Christ because he saw Jesus as he is (1 Jn 3:2).
2. Revelation doesn't all come at once but in bits - God doesn't reveal the whole plan at once. but obedience to the first part makes way for the following parts of the revelation. In Acts 8 we see Philip firstly receiving a visitation from an angel telling him to go out into the desert but not why. In the desert he sees an Ethiopian official and the Spirit tells him to 'go to the chariot and stay near it'. After that it became fairly obvious what he has to do. In Acts 9 Paul has a vision of Jesus who tells him to 'go into the city and you will be told what you must do'. Ananias is then sent with further instructions. In Acts 27, Paul and his companions face a very dangerous situation during a storm at sea. Paul receives step-by-step instructions from God that lead to all the passengers and crew being saved, although the ship and cargo are lost.
3. Revelation of little things can have a great effect. In the case of Zacchaeus, the fact that Jesus knew his name seems enough to bring him to repentance (Lk 19:1-10) whilst in the case of Nathaniel (Jn 1: 43-51) it was the fact that Jesus knew he had been sitting under a fig tree and knew something of his character.
4. Revelation points to who Jesus is. This in turn leads to conviction of sin or appreciation of God's glory. In Matthew 4, the revelation to Jesus of where the fishermen should fish causes Peter to exclaim 'depart from me for I am a sinful man'. In Acts 2, Peter preaches Jesus to the crowds and Jesus is revealed as the Messiah. Many in the crowd are cut to the heart and cry, 'what shall we do to be saved?'. In Acts 7, the revelation of Jesus in his glory leads to God being glorified in Stephen's death.
5. Revelation can bring specific instructions as to what to do or provide information that shows us how to proceed. Ananias in Acts 9:10-16 was given specific instructions about going to Saul, what to say to him and how to minister to him. Similarly Philip was given specific instructions to go to the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26,29), the church in Antioch was given instructions to send off Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2) and Paul was given specific instructions during the shipwreck in Acts 27. When the woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus he was given specific knowledge which he could use in dealing with the situation (Jn 8:3-11) as was Paul when confronted with the magician Elymas (Acts 13:6-12).
6. Revelation can point out underlying cause of illness or other problem and so give insight in how to pray. Jesus knew that the man let down through the roof (Matt 9:1-8) had an illness which was caused by (or at least exacerbated by) sin whereas the blindness of the man born blind (Jn 9:1-7) was not related to sin. He could also see the love of riches in the heart of the rich young man. Paul saw the demonisation at the centre of the slave girl's problems (Acts 16:18 and many other places) and the absence of the Holy Spirit in the 12 Ephesian believers in Acts 19:2.
7. Revelation reveals people's true thoughts and so gives insight into how to act. Jesus knew the thoughts of the teachers and Pharisees in Matt 9:4 and Lk 7:39 and was able to show them their error by his actions and teaching (not that they were convinced!). He could see the real questions

- behind Nicodemus' superficial questioning (Jn 3:2,3). Peter was shown the lie behind the apparently generous action of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3)
8. Success in ministry (healing, evangelism...) comes from hearing what God says, co-operating with him and doing what he is doing. Jesus only ever did what he saw the Father doing and only ever spoke what the Father gave him to say - Jn 8:28, Jn 10:37, Jn 12:50, Jn 14:31 - specific examples are given in Jn 5:1-30 where he healed only the one man at the pool of Bethesda and in Jn 11:1-44 where he waited to go to Bethany until the Father gave permission, even though Lazarus died in the meantime.. Paul and Silas had a successful ministry in Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12) because they were sent there by the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Paul was specifically sent to Macedonia (Acts 16:9). Obedience led to the founding inter alia of the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth. In specific cases God can reveal when a person has faith to be healed (eg the man at the Beautiful Gate in Acts 3:1-8, the crippled man in Acts 14:8-10 9. In all of the examples from Acts above, people took the various revelations to be commands from God to be obeyed.

d) OTHER STUFF

The voice of God often comes as an impression - what the rabbis referred to as bat kol, the daughter of a voice ('Prophecy in the local church', D Pytches). The Jewish Talmuds regarded the bat kol as 'a chance snatch of speech overheard' and David Pytches himself describes this type of revelation as 'the flutter of a butterfly's wings'. All of these descriptions refer to the transitory and indistinct nature of God's voice when He speaks in this way. It has also been described as just 'knowing that you know'.

In trying to decide whether an impression is God speaking or not, a helpful insight is that often it is your first thought that is God. Subsequent thoughts are really your own interpretation/justification/rationalisation. You should act on the first thought.

Sometimes God speaks in a picture rather than impressions or words and sometimes the picture comes in the form of a vision or a dream. The interpretation often comes (to someone else?) in rather the same way as interpretation of tongues. See Annex 1.

Sometimes God speaks through a messenger (angel Heb 2:2, Heb 1:14) who appears directly or in a dream, eg Philip in Acts 8:26. Sometimes the Lord himself comes in a dream or vision, eg Ananias in Acts 9:10.

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