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(choir sings)

SPEAKER #1: Good morning. Welcome to the Bethany hour. We invite you to worship with us at our 8 and 11 a.m. services each Lord's day morning. Bethany is a caring church, ministering to the totality of human need. A warm welcome from a loving people always awaits you when you join us in fellowship. May God's richest blessings be upon you today and always.

(choir sings)

REV. DR. WILLIAM AUGUSTUS JONES, JR: Today I lift up verse 29 in the 11th chapter of the book of Numbers. Numbers, chapter 11, verse 29. "And Moses said unto him, enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" I've given title to this text. I want to talk about *The Prophetic Prerogative, The Prophetic Prerogative*. Prophets are not without rights. Preachers, in their dealings with God have some privileges not commonly known. There is such a thing as the prophetic prerogative. Prophets are not puppets manipulated by a master puppeteer from beyond the skies. The reverend is not a robot. Clergymen, though under divine orders, are not pushed or pulled by predestined persons or purposes. The preacher has the privilege of examination and expression. The preacher has the God-given right to assess and then announce. The preacher has the prerogative of critiquing and then complaining. Now I do not speak of a whimpering cry-baby approach. I'm talking about honest, candid, authentic declaration resulting from serious scrutiny. I'm talking about verbalization that emanates from a clear concise examination of God's people in terms of where they are and what they are about. It is the prophet's prerogative, his duty, his right, his privilege if you please, to tell it like it is—to pinpoint the problem, to unfrock phonies, to expose pretenders and to tell the truth regardless—and encouched in this privilege is the right to register prayerfully certain wishes concerning what God desires for his people. The painful fact my brothers and my sisters, is that most of the Lord's people are never at the level where they should be, and many are making no effort at all to come near that level. Smug satisfaction with meaningless mediocrity is the status of many a soul. A little religion is a dangerous thing. Dangerous in that it cripples, afflicts, stymies, and makes static. Moses discovered this one day. He came to its realization by a hard and difficult route. No man in the long annals of human history was ever handed a more arduous leadership responsibility. From the mud huts along the River Nile to the muddy banks of Jordan River, Moses led a multitude of stiff-necked rebellious people. Every time he pointed forward most of them looked backwards. They were a people who preferred the semi-security of a damnable servitude to the sacrifices essential to knowing a glorious future. They constantly looked back to the flesh parts of Egypt. The wilderness menu was not tasty enough. They didn't like the route of march.

They wanted to make no sacrifices at all. They were always murmuring and complaining and Moses in a peculiarly personal sense had to lead on in spite of a terrible spirit in the camp. In route from Sinai to Paran, the problem swelled to crisis proportions. The situation began to eat away at Moses' spirit. It got so bad, so vexatious that he asked God to take his life. Listen to the man as he exercises a very painful prayer prerogative, "Lord, wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant and wherefore have I not found favor in thy sight that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me. Have I conceived all these people? Have I begotten them that thou should say to me carry them in thy bosom?" Moses continues on until his prayer reaches a poignant peak with these words, "I am not able to bear all these people alone because it is too heavy for me and Lord, if this is the way you're going to deal with me, kill me I pray thee. If I have found favor in thy sight, kill me, and let me not see my wretchedness. I'd rather die and be with you Lord than live on in the company of a people ungrateful and resentful." No prophet ever talked to God more pointedly. No servant was ever more serious. God had to move, and he had to do it in a hurry. God gave Moses some help, some dedicated helpers, some helpers who were generous and sacrificial. Some helpers who were drawn by a dream and captured by a vision.

*pause in recording as cassette tape 1, side 1 ends*

*recording of cassette tape 1, side 2 begins.*

JONES: This is what God did. He put his spirit on 70 elders in the camp. Men who became Moses' armor bearers, his helpers in carrying the load. Moses gathered these men round about the tabernacle. The holy one, the shekinah glory, descended in power—took of the spirit that was upon Moses and rested that same spirit upon these men—and they began to prophesy, to declare by word and by deed the truth about God—but two of the seventy, Eldad and Medad did not gather with the others round about the tabernacle. Instead, they remained in the camp and empowered by the spirit, they prophesied in the camp. This upset some of them so much so that a young man came running to Moses, "Moses, Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." Young Joshua, who would one day succeed Moses but who as of now is yet wet behind the ears, adds his voice to the chorus of complainers. "Moses, my lord, forbid Eldad and Medad from prophesying. Stop them Moses, stop them now. They are out of order, they are not conforming, they've broken ranks. 68 elders are on the outside and they're on the inside. They are renegades, they are too independent, they are free spirited. Moses, my Lord, forbid them from prophesying," —and then there comes in response to young, unknowing, impetuous Joshua, a mosaic rebuke that represents the ultimate in terms of prophetic prerogatives. The right to express a wish that will not happen because it cannot happen but nevertheless, the wish that covers every corner and every crevice of every prophet's soul. A wish so deep and so dear, so intense, and so intrepid that the wish makes its flight on wings of divine solicitation. Here it is. Enviest thou for my sake? Would God, would God, would God that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them. Would God? If only God would. I wished he would. Would God that he would. Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets. My friends, that's the prophetic prerogative. The right to register in the councils of men and before the high court of heaven. A painful wish for a collective baptism of God's spirit. Now one knows full well that everybody in the camp can't be a prophet, but one cannot help wishing especially since the load is so heavy. The need to witness so urgent and the call so divine. If all the Lord's people were prophets, if his spirit rested upon them all, there would

be a different mindset, more wholesome attitudes, deeper determination, and a larger sense of loyalty. If they sat where I sit, felt what I feel, saw what I see, and knew what I know—creative collectivism and redemptive enterprise would be the order of every day. Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets. What anxiety, what agony of spirit, but it's only a wish, a hope, a desire—it is a yearning that cannot be satisfied, it's a request that cannot be granted, it is a prayer that cannot be answered in the affirmative. At the center of such a plea, you will find the heartache and the heartbreak of a soul called to lead but bereft of the power needed to really lead folks who don't want to go anywhere. It is the tearful elegy of a prophet standing at the helm of a great host whose eyes behold a scattered harvest. It is the lament of a preacher wounded in the house of his friends. Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets. My brothers and my sisters, all who dare to speak for God had better be very certain of their calling. I tell all aspiring preachers; don't you preach if you can help it and I tell all pulpit persons if you can quit then by all means quit. This is not the work for anybody whose mama called and daddy \_\_\_\_?? At best and in the most comfortable settings, this road is not traveled without pain and travail and sorrow. It's a rough journey on a rocky road. When you give of your best it's too little for some, when your sights are set on the lofty place, only a minority will share your vision. All will not be of a kindred spirit. All will not support the prophet's vision. Now in the event that somebody is interpreting my words as preacher pessimism, you have missed the point altogether. This is no exercise in ministerial self-pity. I am simply affirming that the glamour of the ministry is a myth that ought to be exposed and then exploded. This work is not a gravy train experience. If I did not have to preach, I would not preach. I'd pack up right now and redeploy my talents, but I can't pack up because I never took preaching up, preaching took me up. I tell the glorious story out of compunction and compulsion. I tell it because I have to tell it. If I couldn't tell it here, I'd tell it somewhere else. If I didn't get a hearing here, I'd move on to another quarter—but sometimes as in the case of Moses there's no other place to tell it, there's no quarter to which you can move sometimes you are stuck. Stuck by the will and purpose of God. Sometimes you just have to struggle on through the storm. It's painful and it's perplexing but I'm glad to be a preacher. For no other work deals so directly with the eternal verities, no other labor deals so deeply with the twin themes of time and eternity, no other task is so intently engaged in pulling meaning out of mystery, no other function leads people to a collision with reality. I'm proud to be a preacher but every now and then I have to cry with Moses, “would God that all the Lord's people were prophets and that he would put his spirit upon them all.” Every now and then I long for more Eldads and Medads. Now these men prophesied in the camp, the others prophesied outside the camp, round about the tabernacle when Eldad and Medad under the spirit's power and conviction began to prophesy in the camp. The camp did not like it. The prophetic word was all right beyond the camp. You see some folks in the camp don't like to be disturbed. Some folks in the camp are afraid of being exposed. Some folks in the camp have trouble with truth. Our primary problems are usually in the camp. You better hear me today. That's where jealousy shows up, in the camp. That's where envy raises its ugly head, in the camp. That's where folks fall out and stay mad forever, in the camp. That's where Satan works all the time, in the camp. That's where hell gets a foothold, in the camp. That's where excuses are bound, in the camp. That's where hearts get holed, in the camp. That's where treachery occurs, in the camp. That's where betrayal shows up in the camp. That's where denial takes place, in the camp. That's where hypocrisy exists, in the camp. That's where lukewarm religion is present, in the camp. I tell you; our primary problems are always in the camp. I've never had a sinner outside the camp tell a lie on me. Liars live mainly in the camp. I've never been bitten by a back biter outside the camp. Back biters dwell in the camp. I've never been scorned by winos and gamblers and pimps and

prostitutes, but in the camp, I've been buked, and I've been scorned. I've been talked about sure as you are born. In the camp, we ought to find love and peace and justice and righteousness. In the camp, we ought to discover sacrifice and selflessness and loyalty and liberality. In the camp, we ought to see the peacemakers and the pure in heart. I tell you like Moses, we need more Eldads and Medads and I'm looking for them today. I'm in search of Eldad and Medad. Eldad, where are you? Medad, come forth! The Lord needs you in his service. His servant needs you in the congregation. I feel the way Moses felt, I have to exercise and express sometimes the prophetic prerogative. When faith burns low and hope is on holiday and people won't do what they ought to do, I have to get with Sinai's law giver. I have to talk with Israel's emancipator. I have to hang out with the Exodus general. I have to spend a little time with the Red Sea expert. I have to get close to mighty Moses. I have to kneel with him in prayer and cry aloud, "would God that all the Lord's people were prophets. That he would put his spirit upon them." Oh, that's my plea and that's my petition. That's my forever prayer for Bethany Church. Lord, raise up some Eldads and some Medads. Lord, put your spirit on your people. Lord, let your breath breathe upon them and Lord, don't miss a single pew. Let your spirit rest on every deacon, every trustee, every minister, every choir member, every missionary, every usher, every leader, every follower, every staff person, every auxiliary, every department, every person in every pew, every child, every youth, every adult, every elder. "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets that the Lord would put his spirit upon them." That's my prayer Lord, you know me, and I know you. You called me to this work and that's my prayer. I've exercised my prerogative Lord, and now I'm waiting on you Lord. I expect you to move, I'm counting on you, Lord. Lord, give me some signal. Lord, give me a sign. I know Lord, that you won't put your spirit on everybody but I'm confident that you'll touch enough souls. Enough souls to keep the banner aloft. Enough souls to combat sin and inequity. Enough souls to keep love aglow in this place. Enough souls to keep Satan at bay. I know that you won't touch down on everybody Lord, but I believe in my heart that you'll touch enough souls to keep evil in check. Enough souls to keep the light shining. Enough souls to keep the ship on course. Enough souls to keep the fire burning. Enough souls to fight the battle and win the victory. Yes Lord! I believe he'll touch with his holy spirit. He'll raise up Eldad, he'll send Medad. The Lord will provide. Whatever he needs, he will provide. If he calls you to his service, he'll provide. If he sends you forth, he'll provide. If you love him with all your heart, he will provide. If you serve him fully, he will provide. If you trust him without wavering, he will provide. If you ask him, the Lord will make a way somehow. Yes! Yes! I believe I'll preach a little while. Sometimes I feel like Thomas Dawson, like a ship that's tossed and driven, battered by an angry when the storms of life are raging, and their fury falls on me. I wonder what I have done that makes this race so hard to run, then I say to my soul, "take courage, the Lord will make a way somehow." He will, yes he will. I know he will. Do I have a witness that he will? Yes, Lord! The Lord I serve will make a way somehow, wind beneath the cross I bow, he will take away each sorrow, let him have your burden now and when, when, when the load bows down so heavy that the weight is shown upon your brow, there is a sweet relief in knowing the Lord will make a way somehow. Yes! Uh, huh, know what I'm talking about? (congregation is clapping and responding "yes!") Been with him for a long time. I've seen him come through, how about you? Yes! Yes! I don't care how dark it gets, nor how rough the road. Jesus will fix it in his own time. Yes, he will. He'll send Eldad. He'll send Medad. He'll send his holy spirit. The holy spirit will then dwell. The holy spirit will enable, the holy spirit will empower. Thank you, Jesus! Yes! Yes! Uh huh! You ought to want him to touch down on you. You ought to want him in your life. You ought to want him walking with you and talking with you. You ought to desire his daily presence. He'll be good to you. He'll bless you.

He'll clarify your faking. He'll clear up your vision. He'll warm your cold heart. He'll fix you for traveling, yes, he will! Uh huh, yes! Yes! Uh huh! Holy ghost! Holy ghost, come on in the house, come on in here. Walk these aisles, move through these pews, touchdown in the choir, dwell with the deacons, touch the trustees, bless the missionaries, be with the door keepers, be with the bench members. Holy spirit, holy spirit, descend in your power, engulf, envelope, inspire—do what you will. It's all right, yes! Yes! I feel him now. I feel the fire burning yes, I do. You can't make me doubt him. I know too much about him. Sure enough, feeling in my heart. I feel it on the main heart of my soul. I feel him and it feels mighty good. Yes! Wouldn't take nothing for this journey. The Lord I serve, he is alright. Yes, he is. Do I have a witness? Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Yes! Yes! Yes! (congregation clapping and responding “yes!”) Come holy spirit, come holy spirit. Heavenly dove in all thy quickening power, kindle the flame of sacred love in these cold hearts of ours. Let it breathe on me, let it breathe on me. That ought be your prayer, let the breath of the Lord now breathe on me. Would God, would God, would God that he would. Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets that he might put his spirit upon them. It makes a difference. It makes all the difference. When one is spirit empowered and spirit led, it makes a difference. When you're under the spirit's anointing you can get a prayer through anytime, anywhere. I'm looking at some people right now who don't really know what it is to touch the throne of God and get a real blessing. You gotta open up, you gotta say “use me, Lord. Here I am, I'm reporting for duty! Use me!” Hallelujah. The doors of the church are open. Anybody here today who wants to say, “I believe. I believe this word. I accept Jesus Christ as Lord of my life and I want to follow him; I want to be endowed and imbued with his spirit and I want to live a life that is useful in his service. I don't want to play church. I don't want my faith to be a one day a week affair. I want it to be every day, every hour?” If that's your decision, we bid you come while we sing the selection of invitation and if perchance there are person's present who live in this city but without church home, we warmly bid you to come and unite with this people of God. We're going to sing hymn number 332, “I found The Answer.” God help you to come. If you're here come to Jesus. Let's stand and sing to the glory of God.

(organ music plays)

JONES: Who will come? Jesus is calling. Come to Jesus.

(choir and congregation sing “I Found The Answer”)

JONES: God bless you.

The creation of this transcript was generously funded by Jennifer Jones Austin.