

Truth-telling, Testimony, and Prophecy: Hearing and Bearing Witness to God's Active Presence in Our Lives in a Secular Age

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Theology Day Presentation

I. Thanksgiving: God has rescued me.

- A. Ps 40:2-11 drawn out of pit and set on rock; new song in mouth; many look on and trust in the Lord
 - 1. Happy those who trust in the Lord and turn away from idolatry and falsehood
 - 2. God's wondrous deeds are too many to recount
 - 3. Response: to do God's will
 - a) Proclaim God's saving deed in the worshipping assembly
- B. Ps 22:23-32 widening circle of those who are invited and join in the praise
 - 1. Verbal and non-verbal communication
 - 2. Miracles:
 - a) Pilgrims to Lourdes – 6 million annually; SW France
 - b) Marian apparitions in 1858 to Bernadette Soubirous.
 - c) Dr. Michael Moran, Belfast doctor on evaluation team (BBC report in 2014) consisting of 40 medical specialists from around the world.
 - (1) Are the claims of cures medically explicable?
 - (2) Cases take years to be verified? Observe a case from year to year;
 - (a) 69 verified cures at Lourdes since 1858'
 - (3) Examples:
 - (a) "a lady with extremely high blood pressure who had a benign tumour on her adrenal gland that was secreting adrenaline and keeping her blood pressure very high and she felt suddenly well. That's a characteristic, that you suddenly feel something different has happened, she felt it when she was in the bath in Lourdes and that was in the 1980s and that was only just confirmed in 2011."
 - (b) the first cure was of a paralyzed arm that regained function suddenly.
 - (c) Another classic example of that is a gentleman from Italy who had a tumour of the pelvis and although you can see the destruction of the pelvic bone on x-rays which are available for the public to view in Lourdes, the bone actually re-grew, both in the pelvis and the femur in an anatomically correct way that would be very hard to explain."
 - (4) Lourdes – spiritual place – placebo effect
 - (a) "a peaceful place and it's a place where the sick are really put first and it strikes you that if Belfast hospitals and hospitals around the world were like that all the time, then the world would generally be a better place."
 - (b) Science and religion: belief
 - (i) Important dimensions of our life – especially our relationships with God and others and our view of how our individual and family narratives are unfolding.

- (ii) Past and future and their impact on the present: faith, hope, and love.

II. Assessing our environment and situating ourselves within it.

- A. What are things we can trust and take risks on them?
 - 1. Committed relationships
 - 2. Promises that others make.
 - 3. Claims by trusted authorities.
 - 4. Observation of how others live and how they have negotiated circumstances analogous to what I might be facing.
- B. Institutions – trust in government since the 1960s; trust in the Church in light of the sex abuse crisis.
 - 1. The current controversy over vaccines? Can science be trusted? Can federal agencies with their system of checks and balances be trusted?
- C. The occurrence of lying in our everyday interactions.
 - 1. The occurrence of fraud – internet/ telephone scams, etc.
 - 2. Communication technology connects us readily over great distances. But what are the pluses and minuses of these technical means of communicating?
 - a) In the pandemic, Zoom technology has facilitated ways of being with one another that have saved us from too much isolation,
 - b) Phone calls for those confined to their homes can be lifelines.
 - 3. Lying has been with us from the beginning of human history.
 - a) How to monitor it and guard against it.
 - b) What are appropriate ways to prevent it? What preventative means are counterproductive?

III. Growing up in a household under the guidance of parents.

- A. Parental instruction: Prov 1:8-9 “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and reject not your mother’s teaching; A graceful diadem will they be for your head; a pendant for your neck.”
- B. Truth-telling vs Lying:
 - 1. Book of Proverbs
 - a) Passages on lying :
 - (1) Things the Lord hates -- 6:16-19—“There are six things the LORD hates, yes, seven* are an abomination to him; Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that plots wicked schemes, feet that are quick to run to evil, The false witness who utters lies, and the one who sows discord among kindred.” Proverbs 12:17 “Whoever speaks honestly testifies truly, but the deceitful make lying witnesses.”
 - (2) Short term goals of the liar -- Proverbs 12:19 “Truthful lips endure forever, the lying tongue, for only a moment.” Proverbs 21:6 “Trying to get rich by lying is chasing a bubble over deadly snares.” Proverbs 30:8 “Put falsehood and lying far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; provide me only with the food I need”;
 - (3) Rulers and lying: Proverbs 26:28 “The lying tongue is its owner’s enemy, and the flattering mouth works ruin.” Proverbs 29:12 “If rulers listen to lying words, their servants all become wicked.”

- b) Truth-telling: Proverbs 8:7 “Indeed, my mouth utters truth, and my lips abhor wickedness.” Proverbs 23:23 “Buy truth and do not sell: wisdom, instruction, understanding!”

C. Prophecy

1. Ezekiel:

- a) Male prophets: Ezekiel 13:2 “Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, prophesy! Say to those who prophesy their own thoughts: Hear the word of the LORD!”
Ezekiel 13:6-9 “False visions! Lying divinations! They say, “The oracle of the LORD,” even though the LORD did not send them. Then they expect their word to be confirmed! Was not the vision you saw false? Did you not report a lying divination when you said, “Oracle of the LORD,” even though I never spoke? Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have spoken falsehood and seen lying visions, therefore, for certain I am coming at you-- oracle of the Lord GOD. My hand is against the prophets who see false visions and who make lying divinations. They shall not belong to the community of my people. They shall not be written in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. Thus you shall know that I am the LORD.”
- b) Female prophets: Ezekiel 13:17 “As for you, son of man, now set your face against the daughters of your people who play the prophet from their own thoughts, and prophesy against them.”
Ezekiel 13:19 “You have profaned me among my people for handfuls of barley and crumbs of bread, slaying those who should not be slain, and keeping alive those who should not live, lying to my people, who listen to lies.”
- c) Potency of the prophetic word:
 - (1) Words of Judgment
Ezekiel 4:7 “Turning your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with bared arm you shall prophesy against it.” Ezekiel 6:2 “Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel and prophesy against them.” Ezekiel 34:2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to them: To the shepherds, thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been pasturing themselves! Should not shepherds pasture the flock?”
 - (2) Life-giving Words:
Ezekiel 37:4 “Then he said to me: Prophecy over these bones, and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!” Ezekiel 37:9 “Then he said to me: Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man! Say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: From the four winds come, O breath, and breathe into these slain that they may come to life.” Ezekiel 37:12 “Therefore, prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: Look! I am going to open your graves; I will make you come up out of your graves, my people, and bring you back to the land of Israel.”

D. Testimony by Word and Example

1. Fear of the Lord

Proverbs 1:7 “Fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and discipline.” Proverbs 15:33 “The fear of the LORD is training for wisdom, and humility goes before honors.”

2. Wisdom and Wealth:

Proverbs 16:16 “How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is preferable to silver.” Proverbs 17:16 “Of what use is money in the hands of fools when they have no heart to acquire wisdom?”

 - a) Narcissism of king of Tyre: Ezekiel 28:4 “By your wisdom and intelligence you made yourself rich, filling your treasuries with gold and silver.” Ezekiel 28:5 “Through your great wisdom in trading you heaped up riches for yourself-- your heart is haughty because of your riches.” Ezekiel 28:7 “Therefore, I will bring against you strangers, the most bloodthirsty of nations. They shall draw their swords against your splendid wisdom, and violate your radiance.” Ezekiel 28:12 “Son of man, raise a lament over the king of Tyre, and say to him: Thus says the Lord GOD: You were a seal of perfection, full of wisdom, perfect in beauty.” Ezekiel 28:17 “Your heart had grown haughty because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. I cast you to the ground, I made you a spectacle in the sight of kings.”
3. What is power?
 - a) How is God allowed to be a serious player in our lives and the lives of our community?
4. Time: past/present/future
 - a) Heidegger, *Being and Time*: limited humans – mortal: possibility
 - (1) Agency and hope
 - (2) Tragedy and trauma
 - (3) Perseverance and faith
 - (4) Worldview and reality of love
 - b) How do we allow the future into our present?
 - c) How is the past allowed to be a continuing shaper of the present?
 - (1) Rowboat theology
5. Vision of Life is shaped by interaction with others but also by attentiveness to one’s interior life and capacity to function as an agent.
 - a) Our Father – adopted status as children of God
 - (1) Petition: “hallowed be thy NAME
 - (2) Ezek 36:19-23, 24-28 covenant and the Divine Name; new heart and new Spirit.
 - b) Divinization: Gen 1:26 humans made in the image and likeness of God; male and female he made them.
 - (1) Humility – Isaac the Syrian vs Rule of Benedict (solitary vs. community)
 - (2) God is love: how to imitate God??
6. Gender questions; transcendence of God and God’s influence on the lives of individuals and the shape of a community.
 - a) Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 1:20-33 and 8:1-36.