

Ephesians 4.25; Zechariah 8.3, 16-19

The Body of Christ is The City of Truth

Because the Church is born from the truth, truth-telling is essential to our unity, maturity, and mission. “Truth and loyalty versus lies and treachery” has been a key motif in the biblical drama of God and His people. **We are at the climax of this biblical drama of truth and loyalty versus lies and treachery.**

The story begins in the beginning. God spoke truth to Adam when He warned Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As long as Adam obeyed that command, showing loyalty to God by trusting God to define good and evil, He enjoyed the blessings of His relationship with God. But when Adam succumbed to the serpent’s lie, spoken to Eve, he betrayed his LORD and adopted a new master. He thought that new master was going to be himself. He quickly discovered, however, that he was not the master, but sin. If he had been true to the LORD he would have snatched the fruit from Eve’s hand, grabbed the serpent by the throat and tied him in a knot. Then, when He heard the voice of the LORD walking through the garden in the cool of the day, he could have handed the serpent over to the LORD to be tried by Divine justice. As it was, the man and the woman had to stand trial with the serpent because of their falsehood. Thus begins the story of man’s treachery of exchanging the truth of God for the lie and worshipping and serving the creature rather than the creator.

This personal history of Adam is sadly recapitulated in the longest drama of the Old Testament, the rise and fall of the nation of Israel, particularly centered in God’s beloved city, Jerusalem. God was true to His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He chose their descendants as His people. He rescued them from slavery in Egypt and entered into a covenant with them. He planted them in a fertile land with cities and fields and groves that they did not build or plant, but whose bounty they enjoyed. He drove their enemies out of their land. He raised up a king for them, a man after God’s own heart, to shepherd them in righteousness and truth. Under David’s son Solomon the nation enjoyed peace on every side. Truly He caused them to lie down in green pastures and led them beside still waters. He prepared a table before them in the presence of their enemies. The sure mercies of David attended them and prospered them. And what was their thanks for all of this? Were they stirred to loyalty? Were they moved to be true to their covenant Lord? The answer is tragic. No sooner has God exalted them among the nations, so that kings and queens with their majestic retinues were streaming into Jerusalem, than they had debased themselves with falsehood. The majority of the tribes of Israel followed King Jeroboam with his calf-cult and rebelled against the house of David and the rule of the LORD. Even though the decline of those northern tribes was more rapid than that of Judah and the house of David, even they, with Jerusalem as their crown, did not remain true to their covenant keeping Lord.

The contest of truth and loyalty versus lies and treachery was taken up in the ministries of the prophets. The LORD raised up true prophets, like Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah, who called the people to covenant loyalty—to trust and obey. But these prophets of the LORD were contradicted by false prophets who claimed to speak for the LORD, but led the people astray from the LORD to follow other gods and to depend on foreign powers rather than on the power of God. Just as Satan had used the beauty and cunning of the serpent to deceive Eve and tempt Adam, so he was using the rhetoric and

impressive displays of the false prophets to entrench Jerusalem in her disloyalty and rebellion against her LORD. Believing the lie always ends badly. And just as Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden, Israel and Judah were exiled from the Promised Land.

Greg Beale, professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Westminster Seminary, has written a book on idolatry entitled *We Become What We Worship*. As the title suggests, he demonstrates from Scripture that our character is molded by the object of our worship. So, the vanity of idols and false gods leads to the emptiness and insignificance of their worshipers. So, the LORD mourns the devastating effect of Jerusalem's falsehood in Isaiah 1.21-24:

"How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them. Therefore the Lord declares, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: "Ah, I will get relief from my enemies and avenge myself on my foes."

She who was called "the faithful city" has betrayed her husband, betrayed her covenantal vows, and sold herself to lovers—false gods and foreign powers. She bought into the lie of idolatry and became false herself. She rejected the truth and so she did not remain true to her God. Thankfully, Jerusalem's story doesn't end at Isaiah 1.24. The LORD goes on to say:

"I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy. And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (Isaiah 1:25–26).

When the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the walls of the city, they undoubtedly hoped for the fulfillment of this promise. There were some bright days under Zerubbabel the governor, Ezra the priestly scribe, and Nehemiah the governor, but the return from exile was only partial. They were restored to their land, but had not yet realized that return to the LORD spoken by the prophets. In the midst of this discouragement, one of the last of the Old Testament prophets, Zechariah, picked up on Isaiah's prophecy and reminded the people of God's promise and God's faithfulness to His promise. It is this prophecy from Zechariah chapter eight that Paul quotes in Ephesians 4.25 where he says "let each one of you speak the truth to his neighbor"—a verbatim quotation with the exception of one little preposition. Not only is the quotation nearly exact, but the immediate context of Zechariah matches the flow of thought in Ephesians (what is future in Zechariah has been realized by the people of God in Ephesians): first, a record of God's future covenantal blessing, then a statement of His future plan for the people to make them a blessing, followed by a command that they will follow in that day to love truth and peace, and, finally, a statement of the international impact of this plan. What Paul is doing is showing that what God had promised through Zechariah has become reality through Jesus Christ. Jesus, who is the Truth, has gathered a community into Himself, a community called the Church, to whom He communicates His truth in every member.

Zechariah, echoing Isaiah, says "Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called The City of Truth (faithful city), and the mountain of the

LORD of hosts, the holy mountain” (Zech 8.3). Paul’s allusion to this text would have us to see that the body of Christ is The City of Truth, the New Jerusalem. No longer are the people of God to be known by their unfaithfulness, their lies, their idols. They will instead be known as The Faithful City and God’s holy mountain. Our relationship with God will be characterized by truth. We will hear and rejoice in His truth. And we will be true to Him. Our relationship with each other will be characterized by truth as well. Zechariah 8.16-17 says, “These are the things that you shall do: Let each one speak the truth to his neighbor; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD.” So all of their words will be true and all of their dealings will be true and make for peace. Unity in the truth—this is what Paul just called the church in Ephesus to pursue, and this is what God promised through Zechariah. The Church is indeed the New Jerusalem, the City of Truth. And what is the effect of this Faithful City and Holy Mountain of God among the nations? Listen to Zechariah:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.’ Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.” (Zech 8:20–22).

The city set upon a hill, which cannot be hidden, The City of Truth, is a beacon to the cities of the earth, to the nations, so that people are drawn from every tribe and nation and language and people. Adam’s treachery is not only recapitulated in the history of Israel, it is the story of every man. Every son and daughter of Adam believes the lie and so becomes false. But God is redeeming people from this corruption and reconciling rebels to Himself through the cross of Jesus Christ. As we are joined to Christ, we are being built together into a dwelling place for God. This dwelling place is sometimes spoken of as a holy temple. In Zechariah it is a city, The City of Truth. You, the Church, are a glorious new city in which God dwells and makes His glory known to the nations. This call to speak the truth each one of us to his neighbor is the highpoint of the drama of truth and loyalty versus the lie and treachery.

From our place in the history of redemption **we are no longer puppets of the devil believing and practicing the lie.** Paul says “having put away falsehood.” The ESV correctly translates this as a past tense. When we put off the old man in Adam, we put away the lie of human autonomy. We put away the lie that I can run life my own way and things will turn out just fine. The lie of idolatry and all the false prophets of our day are exposed. We have false prophets that preach to us the gospel of self-esteem. They assure us that we are not bad people in need of change. We just need to learn to accept who we are and have more confidence in ourselves. We have false prophets of intellectual and moral relativism. We are told that there is no right or wrong, there are only different perspectives. Since no one can see all things from every angle no one is in any position to tell you that you’re wrong. These are all reverberations of Satan’s lie to Adam and Eve—“You don’t need God to tell you what is good and evil. You can have that knowledge for yourself. You can decide for yourself what is good and bad for you. You just need to take ownership of your own destiny. Eat of this forbidden fruit, and declare your independence from God.” Satan is called “the Father of Lies” (John 8.44). All of these lies that lead to rebellion against God are the spawn of Satan, that promise liberation but lead to bondage. Go back to

the beginning of chapter two and be reminded that we were once in bondage to Satan, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who is now at work in the sons of disobedience. But we have put off falsehood. We belong to the One who is the Truth. We have been taught the truth as it is in Jesus.

Now, **we speak the truth to promote loyalty and love to God.** This is what we are commanded: “let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor.” This truth is “the truth as it is in Jesus.” The truth, as we saw last week, sets us free. But this freedom is not human autonomy—running life my own way. This freedom is liberty to know, love, and serve God. That is what we see embodied in the incarnate Christ. Here is the Son yielding perfect, loving obedience to the Father. In Christ we see love and loyalty to God. We see the Father and the Son delighting in each other’s fellowship. This is glorious freedom.

This love and loyalty to God is expressed in the community of God’s people. This is why Paul gives the following reason for speaking the truth to your neighbor: “for we are all members one of another.” This takes us back to the first part of chapter four where unity and maturity in the body of Christ were emphasized. We are to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (v. 3). We are to be speaking the truth in love and grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ (v. 15). So again, since we have put off falsehood, we are to each one speak the truth with his neighbor, because we are members one of another.

We belong to the same body. In order to promote unity, we must not allow the lie that leads to rebellion against God. This will only mean the decimation of the body. In order to promote maturity, we must not allow the lie that leads us to throw off authority. We must, rather, speak truth to each other. We aren’t just seeking to be honest people who can boast in our integrity. We want to speak the truth that will foster love for God and lives lived in loyalty to Him. We are one body. We speak the truth because that is for the welfare of the body.

Children, what is the ninth commandment? Right, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” What does the ninth commandment require? The ninth commandment requires us to promote the truth and to protect our own and others’ reputations. If you break a special ornament that belongs to your mother, are you tempted to hide it and not tell your mother that you broke it? Should you tell the truth? Why should you tell the truth? If you lie, who are you trusting? You’re trusting in yourself and your lie. You’re not trusting in God. Is God always true? If you belong to God should you always be truthful? Can you trust God enough to always tell the truth or do you have to sometimes rely on a lie to get by?

Beloved, telling the truth in this context means particularly the truth of the gospel, the truth as revealed in Jesus. If we are going to speak truth to each other in this sense that means that we are going to faithfully apply God’s word in each other’s lives. We are going to speak to each other about God’s standard of righteousness. We are going to remind each other of God’s grace and forgiveness. So if you see me stumble, you should not just ignore it and hope that my sinful attitude or behavior will resolve itself. Nor should you simply stick your finger in my face and tell me how rotten I am. You should correct me, with a spirit of humility, keeping close check on yourself, lest you be tempted. Confront me

with God's law, and encourage me to repent and find forgiveness and peace in the Lord Jesus. If you see a brother or sister in Christ who is burdened with discouragements, remind them of the hope that we have in Jesus. When someone is struggling with an important decision, seek to give godly counsel. You may not be able to tell someone how to choose, but you can help them think through their decision biblically.

We want to make sure that all of our instruction and counsel is truth and not a perversion of the truth. Putting away falsehood and speaking the truth requires us to know the truth well. Remember our text last week, verses 17-24. The description of the new man is that of one highly educated. He may never have been to college or even graduated from high school, but he is being renewed in the spirit of his mind. He has learned Christ, heard about Him, and been taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus. I love the estimate of Peter and John by the high-priestly family of Annas in Acts 4.13: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus." Where did these fishermen get this knowledge and confidence to speak so boldly about such great matters? They've been with Jesus.

Beloved, I pray that people will marvel at this church when they hear the truth pouring from our lips. But we don't need them taking note of the schools we've attended or degrees we've attained. We want them to say, rather, "it is evident that these people have been with Jesus." Let us be The City of Truth prophesied by Zechariah. And may our faithful witness draw peoples to come, even the inhabitants of many cities. May the inhabitants of one city say to another "Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going." May ten men from the nations of every tongue take hold of each of us, the Israel of God and New Jerusalem, and say, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

Benediction: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." Jude 24-25