

The truth of God markes it upon us

Part 1

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[00:00:01] That what I feel I should talk about tonight has been simmering in the back of my mind for about 50 years. Not the detail, but the overall impression. How vital it is for we believers to get early, good impressions from Scripture, even if they take time to develop. It does remind me, at the end of one meeting several years ago, a young man, a very good friend of mine, good family friend, we appreciate each other very much, he came to me at the end of the meeting, smiling broadly, and he said, there was a lot in that, it must have taken at least three hours swatting to put that together. Because he was a friend of [00:01:09] mine I thought, well, I won't hurry, I'll take my time. And I thought, well, what shall I say? What I did say eventually was, call it 40 years. I don't like the word swatting anyway, but the truth of God, and we sang about it, the truth of God is cumulative, as Scripture says, line upon line, here a little, there a little, and so on. But what has been simmering on the back burner for so many years fundamentally is this. The truth of God makes its mark upon us. It's not that it should, it's true that it should, but it [00:02:07] does. The truth of God has an effect upon us. That's why Catford Lectures are arranged, so that we can come together, enjoy fellowship with one another, but that one aspect or another of the truth of God can be brought before us and it can have its effect upon us.

Now, my burden is to refer you to a few examples, as we have time, of occasions in Scripture where the message is exemplified by the messenger. The message that the servant of God delivers is conveyed as much by what the messenger is and what he does as by what he says. We'll [00:03:10] come back to that later, if the Lord will. The examples that I want to read, I suppose some would call spiritual charades, where the servant of God has to act out the message that he has to convey. Of course, this drew the attention of the observers and the message got across plainly. Now, this first example is Moses in Deuteronomy 34. He'd lived a long life, as you know, 120 years. He'd done some great deeds. He was a great leader of [00:04:06] the people of God in the wilderness and the people are about to go into the land, the people as a nation. But the Lord speaks to Moses and said, now I'm going to take you to a high mountain and I'm going to let you have a view of the whole of the land. We can well understand from what Scripture says that even at the end of his days, his eyes were not dim that he couldn't see. He could see as well as he could have done in his prime and he was privileged to see the layout of the whole of the promised land. But God said to him, Moses, I'm going to let you see it, [00:05:01] but you aren't going to go in. Now, there was a message in this. What was true of Moses was true of the whole nation and Moses was given the privilege of acting out in his own person what was going to be true of the whole nation. We learn in several places in Scripture, in the New Testament, that the people of Israel who came out of Egypt, apart from those two great

exceptions, Caleb and Joshua, as a nation, they were not allowed to go into the promised land because of unbelief. Now, Moses was not marked by unbelief, but as the leader of the people it had to be seen [00:06:02] in his own person what was true of the nation as a whole. Of course, you and I know from Numbers 20 that there was an additional personal reason why Moses himself was not allowed to go into the land and that was because at a vital stage when indeed, as we've heard, that refreshment was needed by the people and the Lord said, speak to the rock, because Moses was in a bad temper with the people that he was leading. It says, he smote the rock and the Lord said, now then, you can't, you can't have a man who loses his temper like that going right into the land. That kind of character is out of sync with the kind of life that's going to be lived in the land flowing with [00:07:04] milk and honey. But the point I want to take out is this, Moses in person seeing the land, not entering into it, and that was a living out of what was going to be true of the people. I take that no further. Isaiah 20, please. Isaiah 20, in the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, when Sargon, the king of Assyria, sent him and fought against Ashdod and took it, at the same time spake the Lord by Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saying, go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. And the Lord said, like as my [00:08:06] servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder, upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia, their expectation, and of Egypt, their glory. And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, behold, such is our expectation, whether we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria, and how shall we escape? The behaviour of [00:09:03] the nation of Israel was cyclical, went round and round in circles. They were disobedient, they were warned by God and his messengers, they continued in their disobedience. God found it necessary to discipline them, using a Gentile nation and monarch as the disciplinary tool.

Eventually the people repented, God provided deliverance and they were allowed to continue in peace a little while, then their disobedience showed itself again and the cycle was repeated again and again. At this time, of which Isaiah is speaking, Israel was subservient to Egypt [00:10:07] and they were happy to be so because they thought they'd be stronger against the arch enemy Assyria than they would be by themselves. Isaiah is given this message where he had to live out what message he had to give by walking naked through the streets. Happily, we are told what the message is. Not only Israel, but those to whom they were subservient, Egypt and Ethiopia, whatever they thought of themselves, and whatever Israel thought of them as coming to their help against Assyria, the Lord says to Isaiah, you must be a living picture of the fact that all things are naked [00:11:12] in the sight of God and this includes the nations in whom you put your trust, and this particularly Egypt and Ethiopia. And because of that, the Lord says to Isaiah, you have to live out the fact that because you've linked yourself with Egypt in particular, that this will bring trouble upon them. Now as we move on to another example, let us be warned. A sad fact is this. If those who are in relationship with God put themselves in league with those who have no relationship with God, [00:12:08] when the people of God make mistakes, when they commit sins, it not only brings discipline upon them, it also has an adverse effect upon those to whom they've committed themselves in league and friendship. So because Israel was happy to be identified with Egypt, this not only brought trouble upon Israel, it also brought trouble upon Egypt and Ethiopia. If we as believers deliberately go along a wrong road, we will not only suffer ourselves, but we will bring hardship and suffering on others also that are linked with us. [00:13:05] Many of us have had to learn over the years that where sin is allowed, we may well repent. God grant that we do. But what we did at the time before we repented very often leaves its scar upon us for life. But it not only leaves a scar upon us, it leaves a scar upon those with whom we are in relationship at that time. Now Isaiah was living this one out. Ezekiel chapter 4, please. Ezekiel

4, thou also son of man, take the attire and lay it before thee and portray upon it the city, even Jerusalem, and lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount [00:14:07] against it, set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about. Moreover, take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city, and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel. Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it, according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it, thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of days, three hundred and ninety days. So shalt [00:15:03] thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days, I have appointed thee each day for a year. Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it. And behold, I will lay bounds upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege. The whole chapter hangs together, but we won't read it all. Simple picture, or is it? I could imagine some of the boys and girls here finding it very much less than easy to lie on your left side without moving for three hundred [00:16:12] and ninety days, or even lying on your right side for forty days. But this was what the prophet Ezekiel had to do. It was a picture. It was a symbol. It was an illustration of what had begun and was going to continue for a long time. There wasn't going to be any early release. The statement is plain. Because of their rebellion, the ten tribes called Israel, the northern kingdom, were going to be subjugated [00:17:01] to another, a Gentile nation, for three hundred and ninety years. Now, you can use your diligence and ingenuity to work out which three hundred and ninety days. Very learned scholars and expositors don't find themselves in agreement, but there were certainly periods which can be identified where the northern part of the kingdom of Israel was subjugated to a Gentile power for three hundred and ninety years. Similarly, the southern part of the kingdom, Judah, was going to be subjugated for forty years, and that's perhaps not so hard to identify. But the thing was this. God had a message for his people, and he chose a servant who could [00:18:07] exemplify by what he did, without saying a word. He was going to spell out the message that God had given him by lying first on his right side and then on his left side for the appointed number of days. What follows after that, the next paragraph, gives us a bit of a clue as to why this should be necessary. The Lord said, oh yes, you won't thirst, you can have a drink of water occasionally, and you can collect vegetables together, and yes, you can have some food now and again. But he says, as a demonstration as to why this judgment, this discipline is necessary, you've got to mix the food with human waste. Ezekiel was horrified. He said, Lord, I've never [00:19:11] defiled myself ceremonially by anything I've done all my life. You aren't going to ask me to start now. The Lord said, well, I respect that. All right, instead of human waste, you can use cow waste, cow dung. Mix it with the food, and it will be nasty to the taste, and it will horrify you, but it's got to be included as a picture that the nation of Israel has defiled themselves before God, and that is why this discipline is necessary. And Assyria was being used to be their disciplinary tool at that time. Would you move on, please? Time moves on to chapter 5, a few verses in chapter 5. [00:20:05] Thou son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, cause it to pass upon thine head and upon thy beard. Then take thee balances to weigh, and divide the hair. Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled. Thou shalt take a third part and smite about it with a knife, and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind, and I will draw out a sword after them. Thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, bind them in thy skirts, then take of them again, and cast them into the midst of the fire, burn them in the fire, for thereof shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel. [00:21:03] I should have said, relative to chapter 4, that where the authorised version says, take a tile, the more literal translations say, take a brick. Now, you'll remember that the first mention of brick in scripture is in Genesis chapter 11, where the people said, let us take bricks, and let us build a tower

which will reach into heaven. Let us make for ourselves a tower, a city, and a name. The first sign of rebellion in that global way, which made the judgment of God necessary in confusing the tongues, was put into practice by making bricks. And this Gentile nation [00:22:01] to which Israel was going to be subjugated, was going to be used as a brick. And here we have the picture laid out on a brick, and the picture was given in chapter 4. In chapter 5, it's rather different. Take a barber's razor. When I was a boy, men used to use what they called cut-throat razors, not what became safety razors. And I suppose a barber's razor is what some of you pensioners will remember as cut-throat razors, even though you didn't use it yourself. Ezekiel had to take a sharp razor and remove his beard. And he had to split the results three ways.

And he had to demonstrate three different ways of disposing of the hair. A picture of the fact [00:23:05] that God would, in judging them, not always at all times judge them in the same way, but that in one way or another, because of their rebellion against him, it would be necessary to bring discipline upon them in one way or another. And that's exemplified in the razor being taken.

Ezekiel. Daniel, please. Daniel chapter 1. Daniel chapter 1, verse 21.

Daniel continued even unto the first year of King Cyrus. Chapter 10. Daniel chapter 10, verse 13.

[00:24:06] But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days. But lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days, for yet the vision is for many days. Chapter 12, verse 4.

But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end.

Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, [00:25:08] there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, how long shall it be to the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swear by him that liveth for ever, that it shall be for a time, times and in half. And when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not. Then said I, O my Lord, what [00:26:09] shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified and made white and tried, but the wicked shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days. But go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot at the end [00:27:04] of the days. We can understand Daniel's kind of message better for having looked at Deuteronomy 34 and the picture that Moses gave in being allowed to see the land but not enter into it himself.

Time has moved on. More of the revelation of God has been made plain.

And many of the things that are developed in more detail, more clearly in the New Testament, we owe to Daniel in embryo. I remember in one local Bible reading, where it was suggested that we look at the book of [00:28:06] Revelation. By way of introduction, as is quite common, someone said, of

course, to read, to understand the book of Revelation, first of all, we should have gone through the book of Daniel, and that's quite right. But if you were reading Daniel, the same person would probably say, really, to understand the book of Daniel, you should have gone through the book of Ezekiel first. Well, so be it. Not many have done it, I suppose, but if you feel like having readings on the book of Revelation or studying it personally, start with Ezekiel, then Daniel, and then Revelation. If Genesis is the book of beginnings, Revelation is God drawing all the threads together [00:29:04] and making plain how things will eventually work out. You don't quite get that far in Daniel, and this is the point I would like to make about Daniel in person. He was privileged to live out in himself what was true in the book of Daniel and what is true in the Old Testament as a whole. Daniel, we read in chapter 1, he persevered. I suppose most of us have gone through making little headings on that lovely chapter, Daniel chapter 1, all the lovely things that can be put under the letter P. And one of them is, or perhaps the last one is, he persevered until Cyrus became king. [00:30:06] So, Daniel, being a picture of his own ministry, the ministry that Daniel gives is that which sustains the godly soul right to the very brink of the will of God being brought to pass and the kingdom being brought in, the thousand years reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. But because it's in the Old Testament and because the period of history where Daniel lived was such, it gives a picture of Daniel, a godly man, a godly Jew, taken into exile, living there, living a sanctified, pious, holy life, true to God as far as his circumstances permitted, [00:31:05] and yet he was not one of those that went back into the land. It wasn't that he was deficient in any way personally, but God had appointed him to be a picture of those who are true to God, if you like, the godly remnant, true to God, waiting for deliverance, and that there will be such right up until the time when the Lord Jesus appears in power and great glory and becomes King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Now, does that work out? What is given in the narrative in chapter 1 that he continued even to the first year of King Cyrus when the proclamation was given to return? Well, for that, we looked at chapter 10, [00:32:03] and we notice that there was a delay at one stage. Verse 13, the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood Israel's representative nation, angel, and there was a delay at one stage for 21 days, three weeks. You may well be entirely right in your own soul. You might be entirely true to God as far as your understanding of scripture and the will of God has taken you at the present time. That doesn't mean life will be easy. It doesn't mean there won't be problems. It doesn't mean there won't be disappointments. In fact, if faith is eventually honoured, it's just as true that [00:33:08] along the way, faith is tested, and usually that faith, the calibre, the character of the faith, is tested along the way before eventually God honours that faith. Now, it was true of Daniel as a person living in exile, doing what he could to be true to God in difficult days as we find ourselves now, but the days were not shortened because of that. Indeed, they were lengthened. His faith, his perseverance was tested, and then the message comes to him, so now there's been a reason. There have been things going on behind the scenes that you didn't understand, but God has been taking account of your quiet continuance and perseverance in the way [00:34:04] that is right. If times get difficult with us, it might be well to take account of that. Not to preen ourselves that we are Daniels, but rather to take account of the fact that if we are true to the Lord, our faith will indeed be tested. Well, that's what we get in chapter 10. Again, a picture of the godly remnant of Israel true to God in difficult days. I read, at some length, verses from chapter 12. But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book even to the time of the end. Now, usually, when God sent his prophet, the prophet gave the message in parable [00:35:02] form, those we've looked at today acting out illustratively what the message was. But usually, the prophet was also given the privilege and the honour of explaining, expounding his own riddle. Daniel wasn't like that. He was a special messenger. He was told, and we can see from Scripture what perhaps at times Daniel himself couldn't see, that because he was speaking about conditions which would only be finally relieved when the Lord Jesus appears in power and great glory, that Daniel wouldn't be allowed to go back into the land. He would have to persevere in exile in a foreign land. I suppose Daniel would have been tempted to think, [00:36:05] if I'd gone back

with the others, wouldn't it have been easier? If I've been faithful all these years, wouldn't it have been appropriate for me to go back as well? But the message was this, Daniel, stay where you are. Stand up. You've got the message, you've delivered it, but you in person are a picture of the fact that the revelation that the prophecy is about is not going to be brought in yet. The fulfilment of the prophecy must await a further period of waiting, and the godly in Israel are still waiting for that revelation that will bring Israel into their pleasant land. I'm convinced of this with prophecy. While by the Holy Spirit you and I may well be given an insight [00:37:08] into things that don't immediately concern us, we are able to see the fulfilment of prophecy and what will occur when it takes place. But I'm convinced of this. With every prophecy, those who will be best able to interpret the prophecy are those who are living in the day when it will be fulfilled. And Daniel is told that. You stay where you are, stand in your lot, and then when the time comes, there will be a fulfilment, and the people who are alive in that day will be able to see what God is bringing about and how it will be fulfilled. So, that's how he has done it. In the meantime, he says, stand where you are, you be a picture, and you a small corner of the truth that you are privileged to exemplify. One more, [00:38:07] Haggai. I'm sure it's been on the minds of many of you. Haggai chapter 1.

Haggai chapter 1 verse 13. Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people saying, I'm not concerned with the detail of the message. There can't be many or any of us who are not aware of this happy statement. The Lord's messenger in the Lord's message. The message to you and me is very plain. If the message doesn't have its effect, first of all, on the messenger, it's not likely at all [00:39:02] that it will have any effect upon anybody else. Going back to the fundamental statement, if the truth of God doesn't have its effect initially on you and me while we read it, there is no prospect of anybody else listening to what we have to say. And it's put in this very direct way. For the message to be effective, the messenger has to be in it. He has to be living it. He has to be expounding it by what he does as well as by what he says. The contrary is given in scripture. The Lord Jesus, remember, recorded in Luke chapter 4, he says, you know, some of you might be inclined to say to me this proverb, physician, heal thyself. [00:40:05] How sad it would be if I have to say something practical to you and you in return are tempted to say to me, physician, heal thyself. If it's true, why don't you do it? Why don't you live like that? Better by far to be the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message. God grant that we might be more like the Apostle Paul who was able to say with complete honesty, be ye followers of me as I am of Christ. He lived it out and then he spelled it out and the Holy Spirit was able to work in others what had already been achieved in the servant. Let us have this ambition to be the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message with any message we are privileged to carry. Now let us [00:41:06] sing our closing hymn 201. Teach us that name to own whilst waiting Lord for thee, unholiness and sin to flee from all untruth to flee 201.