

“Whose Words Can We Trust?”

22 August 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call to Worship

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 221 O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Psalm 12

Sermon:

Perhaps the most immediate and important question the world faces today is can the Taliban leaders be believed when they say that no-one will be harmed by them if they follow the rules of Sharia law? Can they be believed? A subsequent question would be what do they envision as the keeping of Sharia law for women and girls? It would be brilliant if it were true! Time will tell.

I was interested to read in preparation for today's sermon about what happened in the Soviet Union when the Bolsheviks seized power from a corrupt government during the First World War in 1917. Many were unsure what it meant for them; the current corruption and desperate economic distress led them to hope it might be better. The leaders of the churches asked what it would mean for people of faith and were assured by Vladimir Lenin, *“each person must have complete freedom not only to observe any faith but also to propagate any faith....nobody should dare to interfere in this field.”* Reassuring words, but they proved not to be true and thousands upon thousands of people of faith were killed.

This is not just true of totalitarian governments but of democratic ones and, sadly, increasingly common in all aspects of society. The term ‘Spin Doctor’ is now common because of the growth of the use of facts for your own purpose. For example, one ad campaign for burgers said their burger was 20% larger than their main rivals which apparently was true, but they neglected to say it was also 20% more expensive. We could think of examples in sport, such as doping scandals, politics, advertising, media with fake news, people lying under oath in the courts, the church! Sadly, our society has moved steadily in the direction of being economical about truth and we sometimes just don't know who or what to believe. Words are important, important that they are true and trustworthy. When words are spoken which are not true and untruth becomes the ascendant position within a society, it is disastrous for a society and the people lament. This is what Psalm 12 is concerned with. Let us have a look.

I. The Godly are No More (v.1-4)

David has written a song to be sung. He wants his words known and probably memorised. I was interested to read that “sheminith” might mean octave and the idea is that it should be sung an octave lower to emphasise the lament. The lack of truth in society is a cause for regret, as expressed powerfully in the first line: *“Help, Lord, for the godly are no more”*, or as the ESV says, *“the godly one is gone!”* People of faith are absent, and one of the consequences, as outlined in our introduction, is the absence of truth.

For the psalmist, this is not an occasional occurrence, but a universal trend; it affects everyone (v.2) by that he means society generally. Lies (literally, empty talk), flattery (literally,

smooth talk), and deception (literally, double heart, duplicity), leads us to the heart of the matter in v.4, because ultimately what we see is the arrogance of sin, when God is ignored and the influence of the godly is absent. *"We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips-who is our master?"* They are in control, they set the agenda, take no instruction from others, from God, and sadly the outcome of such arrogant, selfish, reasoning and action is that the weak get hurt, the vulnerable are maligned. Bullying, trolling, trashing by tweet, vitriol, anger - we triumph with our tongues, but as one triumphs another is defeated. Sadly, it is a brutal, harsh and unsavoury reality. I was struck by the truth and relevance of the psalmist words. Have we a lying society? Yes, we have.

I hope we can hear the concern, indeed urgency, of the psalmist's words as he laments in the words of his prayer in v.3: *"May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue."* An image that has stayed with me from previous psalms is the idea that God sees and when we remove that truth, there is an increase in sinful behaviour and society must respond with increased surveillance cameras. Likewise, when God is absent, truth suffers, is removed, and we must live with a lying society. Verses 5-6 remind us of the alternative, the truth and purity of the word of God.

There are already challenges for us in these verses: the challenge to lament the absence of truth in our society, the challenge to pray and the challenge to stay involved, to not leave the public square, to challenge what is untrue and false in every aspect of society where you live, work and play. Christians are to be salt and light, to do our best to preserve society, to expose error and bring light. We are to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15); we are to bring God's word to bear on all of life. "The unfolding of Your words gives light" says the psalmist in Psalm 119:130, and that is the task we have been given. When the godly are no more then, sadly, truth in speech will be a casualty. It is important we understand this and resolve to be as present as we can with the truth of God's word.

II. The Words of the LORD (v.5-6)

It was very encouraging to listen to four of our elders preach the word of God well when I was on holiday, and I am immensely thankful to them. Warm, biblical, interesting, reflecting their own fields, delivered with comfort and challenge. Well done and thanks. Ray noted something each of the previous speakers had mentioned and I will pick up on something that Ray noted. He said he had a high view of scripture because it is the word of God. Christians have a high view of the Bible because it is God's word.

Do we live in a lying society? Yes, we do. What are we to do about it? Is there an alternative voice, better words? Yes, the psalmist informs us he heard from the Lord (v.5), and he comments on it in v.6. The word from God is relevant and specific to the concern. It is personal, in the first person, reassuring David that God has the matter in hand. He is reassured about the certainty of God's help. *I have seen; I will act; I will protect those who have been maligned.*

We are not told, and therefore are not sure, how David heard these words, through a prophet or directly. However, they are relevant and specific to the concern, spoken personally, in the first person, reassuring David that God has the matter in hand. David is reassured about the certainty of God's help. *I have seen; I will act; I will protect those who have been maligned.* Similarly, David's comment in v.6 emphasizes the trustworthy nature of God's words. They are flawless, like purified silver in a furnace seven times, a Hebrew way of saying they are perfect. David, like Ray and all Christian believers, believe the words of

God are true, reliable, inerrant and personal. The stress given by the pictures of silver purified seven times is their truth and purity. Therefore, they can be completely relied upon.

Over the last few Sundays, I have been reading Psalm 1 which expresses the psalmist's delight in the word of God, and his ability to prosper and persevere because of his belief and trust in it. What an immense privilege we have being able to hear from God each day, to listen to His wisdom, to understand His thinking, to find help and guidance, to have His promises, to discover His character and to find out how we are loved and cared for even as sinful human beings. The challenge for us is to make use of the word of God and carefully listen to what God says. In his letter to the churches, James says, *"But the one who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."* James Ch 1:25

As we continue in the confines and restraints of Covid, Gods word has repeatedly reassured us of his love and protection. I could have chosen many examples of Gods speaking clear and helpful promises to us in our present situation but turning back one page in our bibles in Psalm 9:9-10 we read, *"the Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you."*

Our alternative and hope in such a society where truth is not valued is the precious, pure truth of God's words in the Bible. So, what will each of us do to make sure we are regularly looking intently into the word of God? We will shortly be recommencing our 3D groups; can I challenge those who are not attending to make that commitment to thinking further about the words of God.

III. The Response of Faith

So where have we got to in our thinking? Society as it moves away from God becomes increasingly prone to lies, to untruth, and this is detrimental to all, affects all in every aspect of life. The clear alternative is to value and live by the pure and true word of God applying it to every aspect of society, something which is challenging and requires wisdom and courage. Sadly, as we read on, we see that the situation faced by the psalmist in society has not changed, but his confidence has. He expresses his supreme confidence in God in v.7 while recognising the reality in society has not improved in v.8.

One of struggles faced by the psalmist as he hears God's word is the simple fact that things do not get better, added to the fact of what he heard God say to him in (v.5) - *"I will now arise"*. God has assured him of His action, but society doesn't change. When that happens what is tested is our faith. The temptation would be to doubt the word of God or God Himself, to wonder if it is real. Going back to v.6, the image of a furnace is very apt; the test is what will be left after the heat of the fire. I do not want to minimise how challenging this can be. As a Christian in Afghanistan, or China. When ill and no cure appears possible, or when the foundations of society are rocked by values contrary to our Judeo-Christian ones. Faith is when we hold on to the truth of God's word; He is love, He will judge, His ways are true, He will arise and help. Our trust is primarily in God and His word, not in the reality of our circumstances, and that requires faith.

God has promised to keep us safe and protect us from a lying society, from the arrogance of those who reject the word of God as truth and from situations of difficulty and distress. The

challenge for us is to have faith and believe this despite the ascendancy and strut of those who honour what is vile and not pure.

The psalm has exposed the sad reality of the absence of truth in our society. It has given us a way of counteracting this untruth by faith in the pure and true word of God. Such a reality and response is not going to be only individualistic we need each other to face.

The challenge of faith in difficulty.

The challenge to daily engage with God's word

The challenge to be salt and light in a decaying society

The challenge to speak the truth of God with love.

The challenge to lament and pray over society.

It is my prayer that each of us will accept the challenge and resolve to be people of the word of God, to stand up for and live out the truth of God's word and trust Him wholeheartedly.

Our society is in deep need of such. Will you and I as a church community of Jesus resolve to live positively with faith in God and His word? Amen.

Praise: Across The Lands

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: IPH 301 Tell Out, My Soul

Benediction