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The Glory of Salvation, Part 3

The most discouraging thing I can think of when it comes to our faith is the notion that Christianity is not true. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul grapples with this very idea.

1 Corinthians 15:16-19, "For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised [N.B., the heart and soul of Christianity is the resurrection of Christ. Deny this and you have denied the veracity of Christianity...]; and if Christ has not been raised [if Christianity is not true], your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those

also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”

Truly, if Christianity is not true, then our faith is in vain and we are wasting our time in a big way! Yet, in the words of Paul

1 Corinthians 15:20a, “But now Christ has been raised from the dead...”

In other words, Christianity is true! And because it is true, our faith, toil, and sacrifice for the Lord is not in vain!

Now you will recall that that was NOT the contention of Rome. Because Christ was of recent origin (He had died about thirty years prior to the Neronian persecution), the Romans, who looked with suspicion at anything new, rejected Christianity! And so, during the persecution that broke out in 64 AD, many a Christian suffered under the charge that their faith was in vain, their salvation stupid, and their hope worthless!

So, what ought the Christian to think? How ought they to respond to this charge? Christ had in fact lived and died just thirty years prior to this time such that Christianity most certainly seemed new. So, it was easy to think that maybe the Romans had a point.

1 Peter (and for that matter Hebrews, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 Timothy) was written to encourage these persecuted Christians to hold on to their faith and stand boldly in the Lord! In fact, that is the focus of 1 Peter 1:10-12! It was written to assure God’s people that the salvation for which they were being persecuted was genuine and true on account of the prophetic witness!

The heart of Peter’s encouragement is that Christianity, and so the validity of our salvation, is established on account of the prophetic witness! Thus, it is important for us to look at the the origin, content, and the place that the biblical prophetic ministry has in God’s redemptive program. We begin by looking at the “Prophet” and his office as defined in scripture.

1 Peter 1:10a, “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful search and inquiry.”

The Old Testament word for “prophet” is נָבִי (nabi); in the New Testament the word is προφήτης (*prophētēs*) which is where we get the word “prophet.” Both speak of a gift as well as an office in which a person was called and equipped to speak on behalf of God. The word literally means “one who proclaims.”

In this regard it is important to understand that the genuine gift involved an external (as opposed to internal), objective (as opposed to subjective) receiving of a word. Consider what God told Aaron and Miriam:

Numbers 12:6-8a, “He [God] said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you,

I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, he is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?"

This is the account when Miriam and Aaron began complaining against Moses. You will recall that Moses' wife was not an Israelite which led Miriam and Aaron to grumble against Moses (v. 2). In fact, *"God spoke through Aaron and Miriam as well. So why should Moses be the one to lead the people of God?"* In response, God called all three to come to the "tent of meeting" where the Lord gave the exhortation we just read.

Notice what this passage says about the true gift/office of prophecy: God spoke to the true prophet "...in a vision... in a dream." In fact, the text contains two parallel statements in the original.

Numbers 12:6b, "...in a vision... unto him... I shall make myself known; in a dream... unto him... I shall speak."

From this we understand that "visions" and "dreams" are the two means by which the genuine prophet received revelation from God. And this we see it throughout Scripture.

Isaiah 2:1, "The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem..."

Daniel 7:1m, "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions..."

Amos 1:1, "The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel..."

Micah 1:1, "The word of the Lord which came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem."

Habakkuk 1:1, "The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw."

Revelation 1:1-2, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw."

O. Palmer Robertson commenting on Numbers 12 wrote this:

Although the context indicates that distinctive favour will be shown to Moses in that God will speak to him 'face to face,' there can be no discounting of the fact that all the prophets will receive their message by a revelatory experience. That is the meaning of the Word's coming through 'dream' and 'vision'. (Robertson, 1993, p. 7)

Throughout the Bible, when the gift of Prophecy is exercised, the mode of reception is always the same: "visions" and "dreams"! In contrast to this objective/external reception of God's Word, the false prophet in Scripture is said to speak out of their own heart.

Jeremiah 23:16, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own [lit. 'of the heart'], not from the mouth of the Lord."

The contrast couldn't be clearer. The genuine prophet of God receives the Word of God as he SEES it communicated to him in VISIONS and DREAMS. The false prophet receives his message as it rises out of his heart — via impressions, persuasion, or a sense of leading. The focus of these two words — "dreams" and "visions" — once again is on an external, objective giving of God's word to the prophet. With this, consider the origin of the prophetic office where Moses spoke to God's people.

Deuteronomy 18:9-17, "When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners [again, false prophets who proclaim their divination from the heart], BUT AS FOR YOU, the Lord your God has not allowed you *to do* so. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, lest I die.' And the Lord said to me, 'They have spoken well.'"

The book of Deuteronomy sets in redemptive history as a series of sermons that Moses preached to the people of God right before they entered the Promised Land. In this passage, Moses instructs God's people as to whom they should follow when they entered the land.

Deuteronomy 18:14, "For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you *to do* so."

Indeed, rather than listening to Satan, God's people were to listen to God alone! But how? And in what form? God answered this with the next statement...

Deuteronomy 18:15, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him."

Interesting! When we think of prophecy as an Old Testament gift, our minds immediately think of what has been called "*The Prophetic Age*" of the Old Testament with Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Micah, Hosea, etc... Yet from Deuteronomy 18 we discover that the prophetic office had its origins in the era of Moses! It was at this time that God — not man — established this office! What precipitated the giving of this office?

Deuteronomy 18:16-17, "This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, lest I die.' And the Lord said to me, 'They have spoken well.'"

Recall the history. When God's people were brought by Moses to Mount Sinai, we read this:

Exodus 20:18-19, "And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.'"

God was pleased to accommodate His people such that He established an office by which to communicate His word to His people. O. Palmer Robertson wrote of this, "The small, simple voice of the prophet [substituted] for all the awesome signs of Sinai." (Robertson, 1993, p. 2)

And so it was in the era of Moses that the prophetic office began. In the days PRIOR TO Moses, God spoke to the covenantal heads of the various patriarchal families — Noah, Abram, Job, etc... This fatherly head would then communicate the word of God to the people entrusted to his care. And yet, when we come to THE TIME OF Moses an important shift occurred: God definitively and for the rest of redemptive history spoke to His people through the prophet! And this brings us to the nature of the prophetic office.

Deuteronomy 18:18, "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

At Sinai it was God's intention to speak His word to His people without destroying them. Accordingly, the prophetic office was established. As such, in its most essential form prophecy is a vehicle of REVELATION — the communication of God's word to man! If there were any doubts on this point, consider that after Moses went up to the Lord and spoke with Him on Mount Sinai in accord with Exodus 20:19.

Exodus 20:19, “Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, ‘All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!’”

This is a massively significant point. God’s people did NOT say to Moses, “Insofar as you are an inspired speaker, we will do!” RATHER, God’s people said in response to Moses utterance, “All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!” God established the prophetic office and gift to be a vehicle of revelation — such that to disobey a prophetic word was to disobey God Himself!

Exodus 20:19, “And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him.”

This is an important point! Because of the NATURE of Biblical prophecy — that it is Revelation/God’s Word — to disregard the prophetic word was to disobey God (and to do that was to fall under judgment)! Such also would be the case for the prophet who exercised the gift flippantly.

Exodus 20:20, “But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”

From this we see that the gift/office of prophecy was nothing less than a vehicle of revelation. To misuse the gift/office was to suffer the same consequence as blasphemy — which was death! Accordingly, God “hedged” in the office to protect it from abuse with three important qualifications — the first of which is referenced in vv. 21-22.

Deuteronomy 18:21-22, “And you may say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

These verses established the standard against which God’s people were to measure the validity of this gift: Accompanying the gift of prophecy was the ability to foretell the future. In this regard, a genuine prophet would have to be one who spoke with 100% accuracy. If he wasn’t correct 100% of the time, he was to be rejected as a false prophet and so executed!

Now if that wasn’t enough, God added to this two more qualifications from Deuteronomy 13.

- The Prophet also had to be able to perform miracles or attesting signs, Deuteronomy 13:1.
- The word/message of the prophet could not contradict the rest of Scripture, Deuteronomy 13:2-4.

Again, if the prophet fell short of just one of these qualifications, they were to be rejected as a false prophet and so put to death! (Deuteronomy 13:5; 18:22)!

Now all of this would have been well understood by the Jew of Peter's day and so the church! Accordingly, for Peter to instruct the early church that the salvation they enjoyed was spoken about by God through the prophets would have meant a great deal

1 Peter 1:10a, "As to this salvation, the prophets... prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you..."

Now for you and me, this may seem rather rudimentary. After all, we are well familiar with Christ's words to the Jews.

John 5:39, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me."

And Paul's words:

Colossians 2:16-17, "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day- things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

For us, it is well-understood that the message of Christ and His grace was foreseen and spoken about by the OT prophets- as Peter himself said, "...[the prophets of old] predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Peter 1:11)! Yet this was NOT at all obvious at the beginning of the Apostolic age. Recall the disciples on the Road to Emmaus.

Luke 24:25-27, "And He [Jesus] said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

Accordingly, Peter's teaching, that the Salvation for which God's people were suffering was spoken about by the Prophets, would have taken away so many doubts and fears. The salvation they and we enjoy was/is given by God Himself! And so NOT ONLY is it NOT of recent origin, BUT it also was NOT of HUMAN origin either! Do you understand what this means when it comes to the certainty of your faith?

The Relative "Truth" of Science

First year geology students are often taught that a large percentage of what they are going to be taught would be proven false in the coming decades of geological study and research! Guess what? 100% of what God told Abraham about Christ, His Kingdom, and His grace remains

true and unaltered! Think about that! That upon which you are staking your soul is a firm foundation which has NOT altered in any way since it was first given over 4,000 years ago (and it has and will remain for the rest of eternity)!

Again, God's revelation in the Old Testament did not build from error to truth, but from incomplete truth to more complete truth! Therefore, as the Salvation we enjoy in Christ today was given through the prophetic ministry, we understand that it of Divine origin! And so truly, "Christ has been raised from the dead"; our faith is NOT in vain!

Accordingly, as the content and object of our faith is God, His word, and so His promises, to stake your soul on this is to build upon an immovable Rock! In the words of Georg Neumark, "...who trusts in God's unchanging love builds on the rock that naught can move." (Great Commision Publications, 1990, p. Hymn 670)

So if God's word tells you that in Christ...

- You are most beautiful to God...
- It is well with your soul...
- Your sins are forgiven...
- The day is coming when we shall co-reign with Christ for eternity over the New Heavens and Earth...

You can and must believe it! There is nothing you have or could lose in Christ that God hasn't already given you a thousand-fold with salvation.

Works Cited

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