

TALK ONE: FRIDAY EVENING: WHERE EXACTLY ARE WE?

I. Introduction

II. The need for a sustaining meta-narrative

We need a narrative that sustains us. “Without a narrative that sustains us, the world -- and we ourselves – are virtually phantom. But the issue is not just whether one has a narrative or not. The issue is whether we have one that is true and genuine, one that can sustain us in reality, one that, having been given it and having committed it to memory, frees us from desperately having to continue to make one up.” (Craig Dykstra, “Editorial: Memory and Truth,” *Theology Today* 44/2 [1987] 163.

Alex Haley's, *Roots*

What are some of the big narratives that dominate our contemporary culture?

What do I think is the real story that my life is a part of that provides meaning to my life and gives me the cues for understanding what happens in my life? Alasdair MacIntyre, “I can only answer the question. “What am I to do?” if I can answer the prior question, ‘Of what story do I find myself a part of?’”

The Story of Scripture: Creation – Fall –Redemption (Israel) – Jesus – The Church- The Consummation

III. The Contemporary Condition in Our Culture

Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*: the unprecedented constant mobility and change in all spheres of life

“In liquid modern life there are no permanent bonds and any we take up for a time must be tied loosely so that they can be untied again as quickly, and as effortlessly as possible, when circumstances change.”

IV. Implications for the Church

The need to embrace our *in exile* status

Gal 4:26: we are children of the Jerusalem that is above; Heb 11:13: the world is not our home; I Peter 2:11: we are aliens and strangers in this world; I John 2:15: we are not to fall in love with this world; Heb 11:1: we long for a world which we don't yet see but look forward to.

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We're in a state of cultural and spiritual exile as we live away from our eschatological home

Need to adjust to a "post-Christendom" world as the Church no longer functions at or near the center of life in America; increasingly a private and diminishing role of the Church in public life; the loss of privilege, cultural influence and respectability.

Lee Beach, "In this cultural setting (Christendom) the church had a significant role to play in the shaping of culture and the determining of the overarching moral structures of society ... Christianity has been gradually losing its status as the lingua franca in western culture for quite some time and has increasingly tended to become a local language used only by those who are professing Christians, not understood by others." (*The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom*, p. 33.

Walter Brueggeman, "There was a time ... when a Christian preacher could count on the shared premises of the listening community, reflective of a larger theological consensus. There was a time, when the assumption of God completely dominated Western imagination, and the holy Catholic Church roughly uttered the shared consensus of all parties. That consensus was rough and perhaps not very healthy, but at least the preacher could work from it." (*Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth on a Post-Christian World*, p. 1)

Enter... Ezekiel...

To Ponder:

What ought the Church be willing to relinquish and what ought the Church be willing to receive in light of its exilic status?

TALK TWO: SATURDAY MORNING: MEETING THE LORD IN UNEXPECTED PLACES (EZEKIEL 1)

I. Introduction

- Who is Ezekiel?
- The 30th year (1:1)
- The 5th of the month in the 5th year of the exile of King Jehoiachin (1:2)
- What is he doing by the Kebar River? (v. 3)
- What is a prophet?

II. Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (1:4-28)

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- Don't miss the forest for the trees!
- What exactly does Ezekiel see?
- Wind storm: storms often associated with theophanies (visible appearances of God) in the Old Testament (Exod 19:16-19; Ps 18:9-15; 68: 1, 2, 33, 34; 97:2-6).
- Ezekiel is trying to describe some kind of vehicle. What sort of vehicle do you think it is? (2 Sam 22:11; 1 Chronicles 28:18; Ps 18:10)
- Four quadrilateral living creatures each with two pairs of wings and a set of intersecting wheels alongside them; comprised of four faces, one on each side: the face of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. Who are these living creatures? (2 Samuel 22:11; I Kings 8:1-14; I Chron 13:6; Ezekiel 10:15-22)
- Sculptures of these living creatures are associated with the Lord as part of what important religious object? (Exodus 25:10-22; Numbers 7:89; 2 Sam 6:2)
- What is Ezekiel describing?
- Based on Exodus 15:17-18; Ps 132:13-16; Ps 114:1, 2; Ps 80:1, where would an Israelite in Ezekiel's day expect to see a vision of the Lord on his throne?
- Ezekiel's reverential vagueness and response!
- What do you think it meant for Ezekiel the priest to see the Lord on his throne in Babylon? What do you think the Lord was coming to Babylon to do? "Wait until you Father gets home." Comfort or Curse?

III. To Ponder

- What sort of boxes are we tempted to put God in?
- In what significant ways are our conceptions of God too small? How can Ezekiel's experience be an encouragement for us?
- In what unexpected places or circumstances have we seen the glorious LORD appear and work?
- Do we truly believe the LORD is with us even in times of darkness, despair, confusion,

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and suffering?

- How can the message of Ezekiel 1 help us in our exilic state?

TALK THREE: SATURDAY MORNING: NOT MEETING THE LORD IN EXPECTED PLACES (Ezekiel 8-11)

I. Introduction

- Ezekiel's visions are “stylized representations of reality intended to make a particular point”
- Organizational structure
- The mindset of Ezekiel's exilic audience

Interpretation of Scripture

Interpretation of history

Influence of contemporary preaching

II. What exactly did Ezekiel see?

- Temple tour revealing worship abominations (chapter 8)
- Judgment on Jerusalem from earthly perspective (chapter 9)
- Judgment on Jerusalem from heavenly perspective (chapter 10)
- Violence in Jerusalem revealed; promise for the exiles (chapter 11)

III. The Incremental Departure of the Glory of the LORD

- Psychological experiment: word association game
- The glory of the Lord is the active, physical manifestation of his presence
- The glory of the Lord in the OT

The glory of the Lord in the Tabernacle (Exod 40: 34-38)

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The glory of the Lord in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:10-12)

The glory of the Lord in Ezekiel 8-11

- Where do we next read about the glory of the Lord?
- Where is the glory of the Lord in the second temple? Remember what we read earlier in Exodus 40 and 1 Kings 8? Now read Ezra 6:13ff.
 - At the close of the OT period, the Israelites are back in the land but still exiled from God's glory

IV. The Glory of the LORD in the NT

- Matthew 1:23; John 1:14; John 2:19: with the coming of Jesus there is a fundamental change in the manifestation of God's glory
- Luke 2: 9, 14, 27: Though the baby Jesus' glory is *recognized and praised* in the temple, Jesus is not *glorified* in the temple, but on a mountain far from Jerusalem and the temple
- The Transfiguration (Luke 9): Why Moses and Elijah?
- Matthew 23
- How the Gospel writer John would probably respond to our psychology experiment
- Where are the temple and the glory of the Lord today? 2 Corinthians 4:1-12 "jars of clay"

V. To Ponder

- We saw in Ezekiel 8 that misdirected worship was the problem with God's people. How can the Church determine whether or not its worship is acceptable to the LORD?

- This *glory-suffering* "paradox" cuts against many popular conceptions of what the "successful" Christian ought to look like. In what areas of our lives have we allowed this misdirected understanding of the Christian life to seep into our own thinking and

