

“Arising Against Lying”

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Psalm 15

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We are working on some Psalms this summer. God inspired the psalms to teach us the way of prayer.

Psalms are a type of poetry. Watch for striking images, repetitions and rhythms, echos and patterns.

Psalms feel. So listen for the emotions: “joy and happiness, gratitude and thanksgiving, awe and wonder, pain and hurt, anger and bitterness, remorse and sorrow, puzzled questioning, longing, agony, hope, trust and relief.”¹

Today, we have Psalm 12. It is a complaining psalm. “*Things are bad, God. I’m upset, God. I need you to do something about it, God.*” I haven’t used complaining psalms much. I complain plenty well, all by myself, without help. Besides, we get the idea that complaining is not a spiritual thing to do. The psalms say different. There are things worth complaining about. Psalms like this can teach us how to pray our complaints.

Read the Psalm by clicking [here](#).

II

This psalm complains about its society. It is a society in danger.

Is the danger military? No, there is no mention of that. Is the danger economic? No, finances are not failing. There is a serious problem of inequality and poverty, though; more on that later. Business might be booming. The nation might be at peace. Yet the psalm sees a community corroding and collapsing.

Truth does not matter anymore.

The psalm tells it. Truth-telling between neighbours is replaced by lying. (We call it “gossip.”) Truth-telling in government is replaced by smooth-talking flattery. (We call it “spin.”) Truth-telling is replaced with saying one thing, then its opposite. (We call it “hypocrisy.”) That’s what’s been going on.

Here’s the thing . . . it is working! The psalm tells us they’ve been saying, “*With our tongue*

¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, How to Preach the Old Testament for All Its Worth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 231.

we are unbeatable.” We lie, and sales increase. We lie, and get votes. We lie, and crowds cheer. That’s what’s been going on.

Here’s the thing . . . they are getting away with it! The psalm tells us they’ve been saying, *“Our lips are our own. Is anyone master over us?”* Without truth-telling, who will call liars to account? Without truth-telling, who knows what is false? Without truth-telling, will anyone care? That’s what’s been going on.

Here’s the thing . . . we lie! The psalm says it’s *“everyone.”* Sure. When truth becomes optional and lying normal, we all get sucked in. The psalmist complains about the society around, but also seems to be looking inside. *It’s “everyone.” I too utter lies against my neighbour. I too talk with slick lips and a hypocrite’s heart.*²

III

Oxford Dictionaries says the word for 2016 was “ post-truth.”³ It was a big year for false claims, during the UK Brexit vote, the US presidential election, the Leafs winning the Cup.

I am not sure people, even politicians, are telling more lies. It just doesn’t seem to matter as much.

How should it work? Someone lies. They get caught. They retract, apologize, or at least try to squirm out of it. When truth no longer matters, though? They lie, get caught, keep on lying, and people don’t care. That’s post-truth.

It’s not that more lies are believed. It seems fewer care if they are lies or not.

Instead, it goes like this. Does what she says fit with what I want to be true? Is she someone I want to believe? Do her words feel right to my way of seeing the world? Then she is right, and I don’t care if she is wrong. That’s post-truth.

Things like Facebook and Twitter can make it worse. We know those fake news stories

² The psalmist makes no explicit reference to his own complicity in lie-telling, though the “everyone” in verse 2 is suggestive. Walter Brueggemann suggests an introspective sense can be inferred. He writes, “. . . perhaps in the heart and on the tongue of the psalmist, this interaction is an internal drama as the psalmist adjudicates between voices alive and surging in his own life. The speaker, like everyone, knows the internal voices that threaten to undo us. It is fortunate that the speaker also has available the victorious counterpoint of the assuring voice of YHWH.” Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 74.

³ Alison Flood, “‘Post-truth’ named word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries.” *The Guardian* (11 November 15, 2016).

get read and are spread more than legitimate ones.⁴ Except that is how old fashioned gossip has always worked. Falsehoods fly fastest. Technology just gives them booster-power.

Online, it's now easier to check if something is true than it has ever been. It's also easier to hide from truth. If I don't like one set of "facts," I can quickly find another, and my own little community of nodding heads who agree with me.

All this wears us down. If we don't know who to believe, we don't believe anyone. The liars win. That's post-truth.

IV

Remember, this is a complaining psalm. The gift of complaining to God in prayer, is then waiting and seeing what God is doing.

After painting this picture of corrosive lying, the psalm turns to celebration. God is arising against lying.

God cares about the truth. God does not lie.

The psalm uses a powerful image for this. An alloy is made by mixing a metal with something else. Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin. Steel is iron and carbon. Metal alloys are quite useful.

However, when a metal is precious, it is not an alloy you want. It is purity. So the psalm compares God's truth to pure silver, which was very precious.⁵ God's truth is like silver that has been purified seven times over, which is perfect. St. Augustine said that God's pure words are "*without any alloy of deceit.*"⁶ God's truth is never mixed with anything.

God treasures truth. Lies are the furthest thing from God.⁷ God always loves truthfully. God always acts truthfully. God always speaks truthfully.

V

As we read, did you notice what makes God arise against lying?

⁴ Juju Chang, Jake Lefferman, Claire Pederen, Geoff Martz. "When Fake News Stories Make Real News Headlines," *Nightline*, ABC News (November 29, 2016)

⁵ In antiquity silver was often more rare than gold, making it more valuable.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silver#History>

⁶ Ellen T. Charry, *Psalms 1-50* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015), 60.

⁷ Jesus said that the devil is "a liar and the father of lies." John 8:44.

God arises because God sees the poor being plundered, and God hears the needing groaning.

It's not that the poor or needy, or oppressed or marginalized, are more truthful. They are as much a part of the "everyone" as we are. What stirs God is not any particular virtue they have. It is their need.⁸

When truth no longer matters, and lies are common currency, we all suffer. But those without wealth, without means, without voice, without privilege, without status, they suffer more.⁹ For in a world without truth, all that matters is power. Those without it are crushed.

But God hears them. God knows the truth. Truth matters. So God arises.

VI

God is arising against lying.

As people of God, we can have nothing to do with "post-truth." Truth matters. When you speak, be truthful. When you click and share online, be truthful. When you are unsure, check into it, because truth matters. When you are wrong, admit it, because truth matters.

About himself, Jesus said this: "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" It's not just that everything Jesus said was true. It's that in Jesus, the truth of God has come to us, and among us, and for us, in person.

Yes, truth is about things that are correct: factual statements, factual science, factual news, and so on. But Jesus is more than simply correct statements (though of course the truths he spoke are precious).

Jesus is truth in person, because truth is personal. Without truth, there can be no trust. Jesus is the One who is truth, so we can trust him. Without truth, there can be no relationship. Jesus is the One who is truth, so we can have relationship with him. Without truth, there can be no love. Jesus is the One who is truth, so we can love him.

In Jesus, God arose against lying. With Jesus, the insurrection of truth continues.

⁸ Ellen Charry recalls an insight of John Chrysostom: "he opines that it is not one's virtue but one's dire straits that stir God to compassion." Charry, 60.

⁹ "Certainly all suffer in such times, yet the poet pointedly identifies the poor and needy who are usually the first to feel the sting and feel it more acutely than those with resources do." Charry, 58.