

Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
February 1, 2009

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 (New International Version)

15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. 16 For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."

17 The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. 19 If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. 20 But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

Jesus Christ is a pivotal person. He once pointed out that He brings division as He turns even parents and children against each other or a person against his or her in-laws, depending on whether they believe or not. Of more impact than earthly relationships, your eternity is determined by your connection with Jesus. So an important question to ask is

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF JESUS?

Announced here was His position as prophet, a spokesman for God. He was assigned to bring the Lord's message. Note the statement, "I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him." Some people misspell the word as "profit" and think about making money. Few are doing that today, so I suppose we would like to have more profits around. Others limit the activity to foretelling the future, thinking of someone who peers into a crystal ball or reads your palm. The future was only part of the work of God's prophets as they also dealt with the present when they identified and condemned sin, assured the people of God's presence, and gave them guidance. They did tell of future events and especially of the coming Savior.

The Lord said He would raise up a prophet. God put them in their positions. People didn't apply for the job. Some resisted His call, such as Jeremiah, who protested that he was only a child, or Isaiah, who confessed that he was a man of unclean lips. Those objections didn't really matter. God was the one who called them, had them anointed and equipped them for their office and its challenges. His authority was behind them in their work.

This promised prophet would not be an alien, some strange creature from outer space. He would be "like me" said Moses. He would be a human being and come from among their own brothers, that is, would be a fellow Israelite.

The promise of this text was fulfilled in Jesus. Numerous prophets brought God's Word to Israel and told of the coming Savior. But the people recognized that there was to be a special one, The Prophet. After Jesus miraculously fed the throng of 5,000, they concluded, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." When Jesus conversed with the woman at the well in Samaria, she stated, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us." His response was, "I am he." The Father attested at the Transfiguration (which we will hear about in a few weeks), "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." The writer to the Hebrews announced at the very beginning of the letter, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." Jesus was the supreme messenger who actually brought the prophecies to fulfillment.

The Savior demonstrated His position as He taught. Remember the reaction in today's Gospel? "The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the

teachers of the law." He could tell you straight out what the Word meant. He backed up His powerful teaching by expelling an evil spirit from an individual by His command.

His message was God's message. Thus it was the absolute truth. It is reliable. Jesus speaks to us still through His Word. You can trust Him. He is the Prophet.

II.

At the same time He's more than a prophet. That function came in response to Israel's request. The nation had gathered at Mt. Sinai, where God was going to establish His law covenant. The people had special preparations to make. They were not allowed to touch the mountain. A thick cloud covered the scene. A loud trumpet blast pierced the airwaves. Then the voice of the Lord thundered His commandments. It's not surprising that everybody was frightened. They begged, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." The fire was an appearance of the glory of the Lord, a sign of God's presence. The setting surely had something to do with their fear, but so did the content of His commands. They demanded perfection, which none of them had, nor do any of us.

So the Israelites asked for Moses to represent them before God. He was to serve as a mediator and bring messages to them. Jesus also fulfills that role.

He was more than a bringer of God's words. Jesus restored the connection or bridged the gap between the holy God and sinful humans. He reconciled us to God by making the payment for the sins of the world. He shed His blood, suffered great physical torture and even worse, the pains of hell and God's anger over sin. He completed the payment and brought us together again. We are at peace with God and don't need to be afraid any longer that He will destroy us. This work of the Savior was greater than what Moses did. He didn't just tell about forgiveness. He brought it Himself.

Jesus is still functioning as a mediator as He speaks to God in our behalf. When our sins accuse and condemn us, He points to His payment for us. That's why the Bible assures us, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." When our attempts to serve God are feeble and flawed, He covers us over with His perfection. When we pray in His name He presents our requests as acceptable to His Father.

So Christ is still serving as more than a prophet. His redeeming work is completed but the benefits continue. He served for all, not just the nation of Israel. His work covered all people of all time. He removed all fright from our relationship with the Lord. We know God as our loving Father, ready to help us. Go to Him openly in time of need. You can be sure of His loving care and guidance.

III.

Not only are we able to come to Jesus, but we are eager to do so because He is worth listening to. There in Moab on the east side of the Jordan River, as the forty years of desert wandering were coming to an end, through Moses God commanded the nation to listen to His Prophet. He does not want to waste His breath. He speaks for a purpose. "If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account." He does not want His words to fall to the ground unheard or to pass through one ear and out the other. Don't you dare ignore Him or refuse to listen to Him.

As we open our ears to the Prophet we hear the message of God's Law. It identifies what is right and what is wrong and in so doing reveals our failures. Our sin is evident because we committed the wrongs that God hates and we failed in using our opportunities to do what pleases Him. The Law pronounces God's anger and threatens punishment eternally. We deserve misery now and forever.

But that's not the last word of the Prophet. We joyfully hear His Gospel as it tells us of the forgiveness Jesus provided. Our record is clean because of Him and we are welcome in heaven with all its marvels. That's the good news that revives our souls and gives us hope and a future. It keeps us coming back to learn more of our Savior and His love for us and for the world. It is truly a message worth listening to because it makes all the difference in the world.

Listening to the Prophet also means heeding what He says. Take it to heart. Put it into practice. We don't just nod, "Oh, isn't that interesting!" Repent of your sins and cling to the Savior whom the Gospel reveals. Know that Jesus is your Savior. You are forgiven. Trust Him with all your heart. As

you follow Him in joyful and thankful faith you also want to do what He tells you. Live your faith by obeying His commands, serving Him and the people He has placed around you and seeking to glorify Him in what you say and do and even in what goes on in your mind.

As we cherish and follow His Word we will not listen to false prophets. Wrong messages would surround Moses' hearers once they entered the Promised Land. Just before this text the Lord forbade sorcery and divination, ways of seeking knowledge of the future that God has not provided, such as fortunetellers and consulting the dead. They operate by Satan's power. Nor should they pay attention to the spokesmen for other gods. They may speak great ideas but if they promote a different object of worship than the true God, don't listen to them.

Death was the penalty for false prophets. That threat showed that the Lord takes His message seriously.

The names and forms today may differ but the danger is as great. Many religious teachers twist and change the Word or deny its meaning. They promote gods that are not the true God revealed in Holy Scripture or they remake a god that fits their own ideas. Keep away from them, God says. Do not listen to them; do not follow their teachings; do not encourage them in their damaging work.

The message of the Prophet, the Bible, is not just high quality literature. It is that, but more importantly, it is the message of life. It tells you of eternal life in Jesus and it gives you the spiritual life of faith. Its saving truths cause amazement still, just as did the teachings of Jesus in today's Gospel reading. That marvelous news is not deserved by us—all the more reason to hear it eagerly and keep close to it.

It's not merely the question of what do you think of Jesus. The important matter is who He is. He's a prophet and more: He is your Savior. Trust Him with all your heart.