

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.” (Deuteronomy 18:15-20)

The Greatest Prophet

Who is the best ever? That question always provokes controversy, whether you’re talking about the best quarterback or the best president or the best place for getting a hamburger. Of course, for football fans, today – Super Bowl Sunday – is a day for debating the best players ever. When you do that, everybody has an opinion. You can argue all day long, but most of the time, you’re not going to reach a consensus, let alone the truth of the matter. What if we leave behind politics or sports or favorite restaurants, and talk about things that matter? Who was the greatest prophet ever? Do you think we could reach a consensus on that question? If we divided the church into two groups and I assigned this side to argue for Elijah and that side to argue for Isaiah, do you think we’d get any closer to an answer than if we were arguing about football players? Probably not. Part of the problem is information, right? Only God has all the information necessary to truly know who was the greatest ever at anything – and that includes being the greatest prophet of all time, too. Fortunately for us, God has told us the answer. When you think about it, it makes perfect sense. God makes it clear that Moses was the greatest Old Testament prophet. But the all time greatest prophet is someone else. You know who I’m talking about, right? **Jesus is the greatest prophet.**

I.

That’s the point of our Old Testament lesson for today. It’s really a prophecy about Christ. **Jesus is the greatest prophet. He speaks with the voice of God.** Now, there is a sense in which all prophets do that. The definition of a prophet is someone who speaks God’s message to his people. All the Old Testament prophets heard God’s voice and they repeated his message. We can even say that all New Testament preachers speak with the voice of God when they proclaim his word to his people. We don’t hear him directly the way Samuel and Jeremiah did. But the ministry is the voice of the Lord in this world.

But today, in the book of Deuteronomy, God says that in a special sense. God promises that he will raise up a prophet like Moses in the future. The book of Deuteronomy was Moses’ farewell speech to his people. It was given just before the children of Israel crossed the Jordan to conquer the Promised Land. Moses, who had led them out of Israel and through forty years of wandering in the desert, was about to die. As the greatest Old Testament prophet was about to leave them, God gave them this promise of a prophet to come.

God said, **“You must listen to him. 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.’”** Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai. When God promised this prophet to come, he didn’t point to the burning bush, where he called Moses. He didn’t point to the messages Moses brought them in Egypt or to the Ten Plagues. God didn’t point to the law that he gave on Mt. Sinai through Moses. God pointed to something else: when he descended on Mt. Sinai to give them the Old Covenant, God spoke out loud to his people. He said, **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”** Then he recited the Ten Commandments. And the people were terrified when they heard the voice of God speaking to them. They begged Moses to talk to God for them – to be a mediator between them and God. God told him to listen to what they said and he spoke to Moses and Moses spoke to the people.

God pointed to that voice and the people’s request to hear a human voice instead, when he promised that another prophet was coming. Now, the truth is, lots more prophets were coming and God knew it. But he pointed to one great prophet would speak with the voice of God and yet, who would come from among their brothers. He would be a Jewish man who spoke with a human voice and yet spoke with the voice of God. Who

is this one great prophet? It's Jesus. From ancient times, Christians have recognized that this is a prophecy of our Savior coming and speaking God's word to us.

Why does Jesus speak with the voice of God? Because he is the Son of God. Jesus knew exactly what his Father wanted and exactly what his plan was because Jesus was there before the world began when God devised his plan. And he stood at his Father's side every step of the way while God put it in motion until that day came when he entered the womb of the Virgin Mary and became man. God raised up Jesus from Israel – he was Jewish, descended from the line of their ancient kings – to proclaim God's message to God's people. For three years, Jesus did that. The gospels are the record of his message and his work. Of course, the number one reason why he entered this world and became man was so that he could live a perfect life for us, die and pay for our sins, and then rise again so that we will rise and live with him forever. But if we never knew about it, his work would do us no good. So before he completed the living and dying and rising, Jesus became the greatest prophet God has ever sent.

The book of Hebrews makes the same point. It says that in past, God spoke to the Jewish people through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, through whom he made the universe. Through Moses, God promised that Son would come. When we hear the message Christ spoke, we are hearing the very voice of God. We can be certain that this is the word that God wants us to know. This is the sure and certain path, the only path, that leads us to life with him.

II.

So twice, God tells us in these verses that he will raise up this great Prophet for us from among the Jewish people. The first time, he emphasizes the voice of God that the people heard out loud to remind us that he is the Son of God. But the second time, he says it a little differently. He says, **“I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.”** He emphasizes Jesus' ministry, the word that Jesus gave us while he was here on this earth, the word that we still proclaim and will continue to proclaim until he comes back. **Jesus is the greatest prophet. He speaks the Word of God.**

Again, all prophets do that. But Jesus was only one ever to do it perfectly. Moses was the Old Testament prototype. To this day, observant Jews consider him to be the greatest prophet and the founder of their faith and culture. To us, the only prophet that can come close is John the Baptist, because Jesus called him the greatest among the children of men. Maybe we might argue for someone like the Apostle Paul to be the New Testament equivalent. But the truth is, the greatest prophet, the greatest messenger of God, in the Old or the New Testament is Jesus. All New Testament preachers proclaim him, if they are faithful.

And Jesus himself said that he did not come on his own. His Father sent him. He said that the words that he spoke were not his own. They were given to him by his Father. Now, there is a mystery here that goes beyond anything that we humans can understand on this side of heaven: how does the Holy Trinity work? The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God. Yet, they are three distinct persons. Generally speaking, what we see in the Bible is that when God acts on things and people outside of himself, all three persons of the Trinity are involved and we dare not slice and dice God, trying to determine which person did what. But in the Bible, we also see the persons interacting between themselves. And then, the Bible is pretty specific. The plan to send Jesus is the Father's plan. Jesus himself says that. Now, it doesn't mean that he disagreed with it or that there was some kind of debate in heaven over it. But God told his Old Testament people that when the greatest prophet came, God the Father would put his words in that prophet's mouth. Jesus tells us that's exactly what he proclaimed.

Jesus came to tell us that there is one way to heaven: through him. Right at the end of our reading, God warns against listening to false prophets. He points to two kinds: those who advocate false gods and those whom God did not send. The first kind are all around us. Islam, far Eastern religions, cults like Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witnesses, even modern Judaism which denies Christ – these are all false religions and the men and women who advocate them are false prophets. But even within the Christian Church, not everyone is called to serve publicly. No one should take on himself the right to preach and teach without a call from God. Further, those who have a divine call but use it to proclaim false teachings are not living up to God's call. When they proclaim things God has not said, at that moment, they are not sent from God. God says that he will call all those people to account: they will face his judgment.

Do we accept that today? Like no other time in history, we live in an age that embraces tolerance and diversity. You've all seen the “coexist” bumper stickers. To many people today, the words that Moses spoke,

the words that I am speaking, would seem like “hate speech.” But God says them. God calls us to listen to his word, and his word alone. Are we prepared to do that? Are we prepared to call people out of darkness into his wonderful light? Are we prepared to stand up for the truth and suffer the consequences in our increasingly antichristian age? If we aren’t, we’re sinning. That was ultimately the problem Israel had. Generation after generation wanted to copy the religious attitudes and the religious practices of the people around them. They wanted to import the ideas that were attractive from those false prophets. And we can imagine them sitting around and asking, “What’s wrong with that?” If we go down that road, we are leaving God and his truth behind. If we go far enough, we will lose our faith. To go down that road at all is sin and deserves God’s punishment in hell.

But there’s also a flip side: sinful pride at being right. A desire to argue and prove that others are wrong. An unreasoning hatred of all things that are foreign to our faith. Then comes a desire to have our government enforce Christian laws and Christian behavior on people who aren’t Christian. The temptation comes to engage in true hate speech and in real hate crimes. To say that Jewish or Muslim teaching disagrees with the Bible is on thing. To hate and persecute Jews or Muslims is something else. Many of the most racist groups in our country, many of the most violent people in our country, clothe their sin in Bible passages and supposed Christian theology. To make Christ the source of our sinful hatreds is blasphemy. That sin, too, deserves God’s punishment in hell.

So what are we going to do? We lurch from one extreme of sin to other. How can we possibly live according to the words of Christ? By applying his message to ourselves. Jesus came to live in our place. He was the only perfect Christian who ever lived. He alone trusted in God and proclaimed his word without compromise or failure, and also without unreasoning hatred or anger. His perfect trust in his Father, his perfect life of faith, counts for all of us. God sees him when he looks at us. And Jesus died and he paid for all those people who follow false gods. Jesus died and paid for us and our desire to fit into the world around us and to incorporate our society’s sinful ideas into our church. Jesus died and paid for every time we hated the people who disagree with us and who live sinful lives. He paid for all our sin. In God’s eyes, his blood wipes it all away. Jesus rose to show us that our sin is paid for and that we will live with him forever. Now the power of his resurrection works in our lives and leads us to live for him.

That is the key. It’s all about Jesus. The more we hear and understand the greatest prophet ever, the more our faith grows and the more clearly we see the path that God lays out for us in this life. Even on Super Bowl Sunday, there can be no debate among us. God has told us who is for the greatest prophet of all time. That prophet is the Son of God and he is our Savior. He comes to us, day after day, in his Word and we hear the voice of God. Listen to that voice and grow in faith and in a Christian life. Amen.