

Listen to God's Promised Prophet's Voice...Alone! Deuteronomy 18:15-20

4th Sunday after Epiphany 1/29/2012 Pastor Aaron Nitz

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ, It makes a father feel good and needed. It'll happen sometimes when one my daughters are startled or scared of something whether it be a dog they don't know or someone they don't know. Almost instinctively they will hold their hands up begging to be picked up and held. Why? Well, there's just something about being in Daddy's or Mommy's arms that gives a certain security and comfort, isn't there? There's a certain protection to have someone who has authority or power or influence who is looking out after you. And this applies to more than just children. Part of what makes us feel safe is that we have a police force who have authority to keep us safe. We're not scared of being invaded by an enemy country because we have an army that has authority to protect us. The same goes for our lives of faith, we have protection, but that protection is only found in and through God's chosen His instruments- His Words and Sacraments.

Well, the Israelites about 3,400 years ago had someone in authority who looked after them. This was Moses. Moses had faithfully led the Israelites for about forty years through some very tough times, times of rebellion, times of battle, etc. Now the Israelite nation is finally ready to start taking over the Promised Land, which God had promised to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Yet, Moses is not going to lead them in, Moses is going to die and he knows that. So the book of Deuteronomy is a collection of Moses' farewell speeches or sermons to God's people whom he dearly loved. Moses was truly a faithful leader who often showed how much more he was concerned about other people than himself. Remember, God Himself hand-picked Moses at the burning bush, God used Moses when He sent those plagues on Egypt, God parted the Red Sea when Moses stretched out his hands, God appeared to Moses when He gave the 10 commandments, God would meet with Moses at the tent of meeting, God allowed Moses to see the backside of His glory when He put him in a cleft in the rock, and it is said that God spoke with Moses face to face, and at the end of Deuteronomy we're told: **"Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face...for no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel"** (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

So Moses, God's prophet, who spoke on behalf of God, is now about to leave the people. So what he's laying down in the book of Deuteronomy is kind of his last word. After leading the Israelites for so long, what is it that he wants them to know? **"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."** So at some point God will send another prophet, someone who would speak to the people God's Word, and this prophet will be like Moses. So put yourself in Moses' congregation, who are we looking for? We're looking for a prophet who will come from God, but also be from us, who will be like Moses who met with God, performed miraculous signs, and spoke God's Word. He goes on, **"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.'"** Remember when this happened? The name Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai. Mt. Sinai is where the Lord descended with smoke and fire, thunder and lightning and gave the 10 commandments to Moses. When God came with the law it brought fear and trembling and the people essentially said, "We don't want God to come in the full force, we want a mediator, a go-between, someone to intercede for us on our behalf." So, **"The Lord said to me: 'What they say is good. 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.'"** God liked there idea, which was His plan all along. Notice what God does. When God comes to us in the law (as he did on Sinai) it shows us how horribly we've failed to keep God's commands and we see God's power and wrath on law-breakers and we are filled with dread and fear, like the Israelites, and we want an intercessor, a go-between, a Savior, the Gospel. And since this Prophet who is coming, whom God has sent, will tell us God's very own Words, God is very serious when it comes to listening to this Prophet. **"If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. 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."** God isn't playing around here, He's dreadfully serious, if someone refuses to listen to God's Word given through this coming Prophet, God Himself will call him to account. Who falls into this category? Well, people who say, 'I don't have time for God in my life right now, I'm taking my chances that God doesn't exist, why should I listen to what the Bible says?' God elsewhere says, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

God's second warning involves someone who claims to be speaking God's words, but says things that God hasn't said or who speaks things that are from some supposed other god, a false god. The punishment is death. Will you agree

with me that in the OT God showed Himself very serious about His Word? Maybe you're thinking right now, "Wow, God sure sounds pretty harsh here, I mean, the death penalty for someone who adds or subtracts from God's Word?" Yet this wasn't without a purpose. We're actually glad God ordered this. We're thankful. Why? Several thousand years later we still have God's true words preserved for us in the Bible!

Now fast forward from Moses to about the late 20s A.D. Here we have the fulfillment of this prophecy in Deuteronomy, but don't take my word for it, look at it yourself. Jesus went into their church of the day, the synagogue, and began to teach. And his teaching amazed everyone there because He taught as one with authority. Then when an evil spirit, sent by the devil, cries out in order to disrupt, distract, and dispute Jesus, Jesus drives it out. With what? His words. And people were amazed at who Jesus is, His teaching, His miraculous working, and news spread all over about Him. Jesus is the fulfillment of Moses' words.

It's important for us to realize this: the devil's main purpose is to distract you from hearing God's Words (just like the evil spirit tried to do), to disrupt your life in order to hinder you from being connected with the Lord through His Word, because he wants nothing more than to destroy your faith. Jesus, on the other hand, drives the devil out with His words of authority and power. That's why God says in our text it's so important to a.) Listen to Jesus' words b.) not be distracted from them by anything else.

In order that we might be prepared, let's for a moment put ourselves behind the enemy's sidelines so we can see what some of the devil's battle plans look like. Now his goal is always to lead people away from Jesus and His words. One way he'll do is by distracting you from even hearing God's Word, that one works pretty well for many. But it hasn't worked on you since you're still here hearing God's Word. So what's his next step? Something that is perhaps a bit more subtle is getting you to believe some false doctrine, false teaching. So, if you were him what would you do? If you're smart and he's very smart- he knows what human beings are like- you start out with a little bit, you test the waters. You're not going to begin by calling into question some of the very fundamental truths of Scripture, for instance, he's not going to begin by outright denying that someone is saved totally and completely through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. You're not going to start there. But if he's smart where's he going to start? Well, just like someone doesn't become an alcoholic overnight but starts out with a minor little drink, which leads to another, and another and another and... you get the picture. The devil starts by calling into question "minor" teachings of God's Word. (Let's be clear here, there aren't major and minor teachings in the Bible- they are all vitally important). He starts by casting doubt on different things: "God can't really mean it's a sin to live together before you're married, can he? God can't be serious when He says that people who don't believe in Jesus go to hell, can he? So if those parts aren't really true well then maybe other parts aren't true either...maybe baptism isn't all that important, maybe that part about how I'm sinful isn't that important, maybe that part about Jesus rising from the dead isn't all that important..." Wow, do you see where we are? Unfortunately there are many churches today that have gone down that path and devil is jumping for joy. Why? Because a little false teaching spreads like gangrene. And the truth is, none of us is immune to the devil's deceptions, any of us could fall prey at anytime, all he has to do is get a foothold in your life and get you to believe something contrary to God's Word and will.

And there are so many things in our lives that contradict what God tells us in His Word. Just think about it for a minute. The devil's voice is all around us in movies, in TV shows, in magazines, on the internet, in the mouth of a friend. In anything that makes sin look fun and trivial. Anything that tempts us to doubt God's Word or forget God's Word or neglect God's Word is a false prophet and in that sense needs to be "put to death" by us. Yet, even worse, however, are the false prophets that come to us and appear to speak in God's name. Who are they? Not everything at the Christian book store is worthwhile to read, not every TV evangelist preacher is worthwhile to listen to, not every religious information we hear is worthwhile to take to heart. Forgive us Lord for seeking truth outside of the only truth, which is Your word!

So, now we see why God takes His Word so seriously. Because it is the only antidote to the devil's schemes and temptations. God wants us to cling to His word in its truth and purity and to shun, separate from, keep away from anyone who teaches something different from God's pure Word. So what does that mean for us? Well, that means we ask the Lord for a discerning heart to distinguish when someone is telling us something that is according to God's Word and when someone is not. It means taking everything we hear and comparing it to what we have learned from God's Word.

You see, God takes His Word seriously because of what it is! Why would we want to believe any lie of the devil? Any lie of the devil distorts the "picture" of God's Word; it makes it harder to see Jesus. Let us, rather, hold on to all of God's Word and not let any of it go because of what it is! What are the words of the Prophet God wants us to listen

to? "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." "I am the way the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me." "I am the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

You see, it's God's Word that equips you, strengthens you, and encourages you! When God's Words are held on to the devil must run and hide, because Jesus' words drive the devil out! There is no need to be afraid or timid or fearful as you approach life you have Jesus' own powerful words! Jesus words' drive the devil far away, Jesus' words give life, Jesus' words remind you of your Savior, Jesus' words lead you and guide you, Jesus' words keep you on the path that leads to your eternal home in heaven with Him. So, listen to the words of God's promised Prophet; they are meant to give you life! And listen to them alone! Amen.