

January 28, 2024

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

**“It Is To Jesus You Shall Listen!”**

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The context of our Old Testament lesson is very important. The new generation of Israelites were standing on the opposite side of the Jordan river and were about to enter the promised land, which was a picture of heaven. They needed someone to lead them into promised land. But Moses, one of the greatest prophets in Old Testament history, would not be the one to lead them. Why? Because he had blatantly sinned against God and it was necessary for all to understand that he was not the sinless Savior of the world. Back when there was no water for the congregation in the wilderness, Moses was commanded by the Lord to take his staff, assemble the congregation with Aaron, and according to Numbers 20:8, he was to “*tell the rock* before their eyes to yield its water.”

Moses did not listen. Moses did not do what he was commanded. He did not “tell the rock.” Instead, it is recorded in the book of Numbers (20:11-12) that:

Moses lifted up his hand and *struck the rock with his staff twice*, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.”

Moses would not be the one to lead the people. Joshua will succeed Moses, and he will only bring the people to the picture of heaven. And that brings us to our Old Testament lesson. The Lord promises another prophet, one greater than Moses and Joshua. We read: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers - *it is to him you shall listen ...*” Jesus of Nazareth is this prophet. We are to **listen to him**. You might recall in the seventeenth chapter of the gospel of St. Matthew that Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There Jesus was transfigured before them and we are told in verse five that, “... a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; *listen to him.*’”

With Jesus, the Father is pleased. That’s because Jesus perfectly listens to his Father and says and does all that he is supposed to say and do for us in the flesh, unlike Moses. The Father identifies this Jesus of Nazareth as his one and only Son - God of very God. Jesus is the only one who can truly accomplish our exodus from sin, death, and the power of the devil to bring us to eternal life. This is further proven in our gospel lesson. By the rebuke and command of Jesus, an unclean spirit comes out of a man. Yes, Jesus has the power of his speaking over all the forces of evil. In this way people understood that Jesus’ teaching was with authority. It is no wonder why his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

So, what does all of this really mean? I think it goes without saying that we are living in a fallen world where there are many conflicting voices vying for our attention. The voices that are speaking to you all day long on your cell phone, internet, radio, television, and in everyday conversations are not just trying to get your attention. That’s where it starts, but that’s not where it ends. It isn’t good enough to simply have

your attention, but these voices want your affection. They want to win your heart. The next logical step is that they influence your attitudes. They are trying to subtly change the way you think about things.

You see, ultimately the voices that you are listening to are trying to influence the way in which you live. This may sound creepy, but that is the nature of words. Words are not merely words. They move into our inner being and can change our day and destination. That is exactly what Jesus is trying to do to us. He wants to be the voice that gets your attention, that influences your attitudes. He wants his words to convict and love you so that you love others, and he desires to bring you to a destination with him in paradise. In your life, is Jesus greater than the other voices?

I think that we would like to think so as Christians. And yet we often find ourselves shying away from listening to him. We especially see this when other words we are listening to are getting the best of us. We are tempted to seek direction in ways that only bring death. We see this in the words of warning that precede our Old Testament text. In Deuteronomy 18:9-14 we read the following:

When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do this.

You know as I well as I do that our American culture is more and more looking and listening to the so-called “paranormal” to answer questions regarding life. Witches, street drugs, fortune tellers, and those who consult the dead are now considered valid and viable pursuits to guide our lives down here and answer spiritual questions. There is also a growing of atheism in our country and indifference which leads to moral decay and the acceptance of things that lead to tremendous despair. And then there is the unbelievable growth of eastern religions in our country. Some of them seek heaven on earth. Others promote good works to enter a state of happiness.

All of this, and so much more, is vying for our attention and affection. These contradictions to truth weigh heavily upon the Christian, and especially the Christian that tends to avoid a real meditation of the Word of Christ. Satan lies to us all the time. He says that good is evil and evil is good. He says that right is wrong and wrong is right. His demons say the same. And all humans who unknowingly or knowingly follow them say the same things. He is constantly whispering in our ears the same sweet little lies that he whispered into the ears of our first parents to murder our souls.

Who will lead us with the unassailable truth? **It Is To Jesus You Shall Listen!** Jesus was more than a prophet. He is the embodiment of truth. He was the one who fulfilled all the pictures of the past.

He had come into this world to speak God's final word regarding the good news of our salvation. As the writer to the Hebrews declares (1:1-3): "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power." Jesus is the only one qualified to speak what was on the "mind" of God since he himself is the Son of God. And therefore, he is obviously greater than Moses. As one Lutheran author puts it:

Jesus not only speaks God's Word, he is God's Word, become flesh. Jesus not only knew the Father face-to-face, he is the face of the Father. Moses longed to see the Lord's glory, while Jesus is the glory of the Father. Moses led Israel to the brink of the promised land; Jesus completely finishes what he began.

And there you have it! The importance of the exodus event in the Old Testament is only important because Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled our exodus from sin, death, and the devil. As the Passover lamb freed the Israelites from certain death in Egypt, so does the cross of Jesus, the true lamb of God, free us from our sin, death, and hell. In the minds of the Jews of the past, the expression: "the steadfast love of the Lord" was connected to the exodus, which foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah. For us, true love is the giving of God's one and only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins - Jesus. And faith in this atoning sacrifice is a certainty that we will enter the forever promised land of heaven - paradise.

Let us hear him! Let us not be deceived by the many false voices that we find in this fallen world. Let us hear Jesus by faithfully and eagerly studying the Bible, living him in our baptism, and receiving him in Holy Communion. For when these have your full attention and your affection you are already in the promised land by faith so that when you look to the other side of the Jordan, you may say with the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:14, "... thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession!"

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott