

<Read text: Dt 18:15-20>

Moses spoke these words to the nation of Israel before they entered the promised land of Canaan. He would not be going with them. He had been their guide and their contact to God for over four decades. He was their prophet, their messenger of God. Through him, God spoke his word to the people. Moses was the authority, but of course, only through God's backing, only as God's representative. And now he was leaving. But God did not want the people to worry that they would be left alone. So through Moses he promised a new prophet of the Lord would come who would speak God's word to them, and they were to listen to him. In the centuries that followed, many great prophets were raised up in the land of Israel.

We have heard their names, I'm sure any of us could rattle off a few if we needed to. Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, Micah, Malachi. All great prophets that the Lord raised up for his people. All proclaimers of his word that the people were to listen to.

The problem was...the people usually didn't listen...did they?

As the nations of Israel and Judah sank further and further away from the true God, God sent these messengers to tell them the truth. To call them back to himself. To warn them that the path they were on could only end in destruction. And the prophets had God's backing, God's authority as he granted it. They were given the ability to perform miracles. They were told things that had not yet happened so that they could be proven to be speaking for God when they did happen. And yet, despite all this...people generally did not listen. The nation continued its downward spiral (yes, it had a few moments that looked briefly positive, but they didn't last) and in the end God's threats against their unbelief were not empty and he used the nation of Assyria to destroy Israel and later the Babylonians to carry off Judah.

Whenever we look back at the history of Israel, you can't help but feel that it's pretty tragic. They had it all laid out for them. There was proof, there was prediction and there was warning. And all they had to do was return to a God who had shown them nothing but love. Now, I don't know about you, but when I used to read these stories of the Old Testament Israelites, it frustrated me to no end that they could possibly be so *thick* about this all. In fact, part of me wished I had lived in those times so that I could not only have seen those miracles myself, but so that I could speak up in those prophets' defense, and try to get people to listen them. Maybe if enough people joined in we could've turned the nation away from its course and saved it from all that unnecessary suffering. At the very least I could've been an ally to the prophet, there's no way I would've just ignored what he had to say about God and gone on about my life. And I certainly never would have joined in the attacks against them that happened so often.

It's a pretty easy line of thinking to fall into as we look back, isn't it? Certainly if it had been *us* there the nation would have fared better. How can you just ignore the authority God in those prophets? The signs, the wonders, the truths? No, if we had been there, we would've done better. That prophet of God would've had our full support in everything.

At least...that's what we like to think.

It's easy to look back and think we'd do better. But maybe a better question would be, are you doing that now? Because you *are* in that situation. You *have* been sent a prophet of God, one with true authority, to speak his word to you. Our entire world has.

In the gospel of Luke, it says about Jesus, **"They were all filled with awe and praised God. 'A great prophet has appeared among us,' they said. 'God has come to help his people.'" (7:12)**

As great as all those prophets were that God rose up to speak to his people...well they were all instruments. They were all still sinful human beings who spoke what they did by revelation from God. The true authority was still God's, just working through them. The greatest prophet ever...was God himself. He could speak God's word without borrowed authority because he is God himself. Even more than that he is the Word of God himself. In John's gospel it says, **"The Word was with God and the Word was God."** (Jn 1:1) and also **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."** (Jn 1:14) And so that great prophet, that great authority is still here. We know he is ruling over this world to one end, to benefit his church, but he is not silent in that either. He is here in the word. He is still speaking that word. The fact that he uses people like you and me to share that word does not change the fact that it is his word and his work and his authority. He is proclaiming the truth of God's kingdom in this world every day, just like he did when he walked this earth visibly and just like the prophets who came before him did.

So *is* our time any different than the prophets of old? The people still turn an indifferent ear to the message of truth. The entire world has been given the evidence, and have all been warned about the consequence of turning away from God. Everyone is asked to return to a Father who has shown them only love. It's certainly no less bewildering or frustrating when people refuse to listen.

So if we're in that situation just like we might have wished we were with the prophets of old...then how are we holding up? We have all those grand thoughts about how we would have been different if we had been around then. We would've supported their message! Rallied other people to their cause! Maybe even saved their nation from having to be destroyed by calling enough people back to God. And those ideas are great, that's the kind of zeal God wants us to have for him! We have the greatest prophet, Jesus and his authority behind us just like the prophets of old. So how are you doing in living up to those expectations when it comes to helping out the Prophet? Do we listen intently when our prophet speaks? Or do we tune him out sometimes because, "weeell, I don't really want to hear that, if I listened there I might have to change the way I'm living, and I'm pretty comfortable right now." Or "ehhhh...I've heard that one before...tuning out." Do we stand up for the Prophet and his message when he's attacked, indignant that anyone would even think it possible to question what God has spoken? Or do we remain silent, allowing the world to mock and ridicule Jesus as they see fit? Go along with it because it's just easier than causing a fuss? Do we make every effort to save our nation, our people from destruction by calling them personally back to the true God? Do we try to win them over, show them the Prophet's message and use all the resources we have to get that message into the hands of more people? Or are we content that we've heard it, and that kind of work can go to somebody else? It'll get taken care of...probably.

No...when it comes to faithfully standing by the Prophet, to hearing and sharing his Word with all zeal, we come up short. We're not as great as we maybe imagined ourselves to be and we're certainly not measuring up to the loyalty God expects of us. We haven't cast our lot in with the pagans yet, but we're certainly not the help to our God that we'd hoped we would be. Plainly put, we've failed.

But *that* is exactly why the Prophet came. When you get home, take a look at Isaiah 61. The word he came to proclaim was good news to the poor! Freedom for the captives! Release from darkness. He is here to bind up those who are brokenhearted and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. These are all fulfilled by the great prophet Jesus and they are all meant for you. Yes, we have failed our God. Yes, we deserve only punishment for the way we've failed him. The law of God falls on our hearts and can only crush us. But when he sends his messenger, the message is one of hope and comfort. The message of the Prophet is good news, or the word we usually use, "gospel". And this gospel message is delivered in such a unique and wonderful way. It's not just a message from our God through any prophet, it's a message spoken by God himself in the person of Jesus. And Jesus wasn't just telling us empty platitudes or giving us hollow comfort, he was promising something that he himself would bring about! He had the full authority to promise it because it was his authority.

The great Prophet Jesus tells us the best news, the forgiveness he has earned for us in his death. The guilt we have for failing him is nowhere to be found. And he grants us the use of his authority, the power to serve him in all things that just fills us up to overflowing. When we let ourselves realize just how hopeless our own situation was and compare that to the undeserved lengths to which our Savior went for us, well it just gives us that joy we can't help but share. Listen to him, stand by him, stand up for him. Not out of obligation but out of the irrepressible joy that flows naturally from what he's told us and what he's done for us. He has shown us nothing but love. We are given the strength and authority to serve as his messengers now, helping him to share this blessed news with all those who need to hear it.

We are in a world that still wants to ignore or even hate the Prophet. The world may want to forget him, but he is coming, whether they like it or not, whether they are ready or not. And when he does, they will all recognize his authority. Every knee will bow to him, but for those who failed to acknowledge him until then it will not go well. Be his instrument. Spread the word of the Prophet, the Word of God. Now is the time. At every moment souls are dying and at any moment our time to act may be over. Bring his good news to them so that they too may believe and be saved.

Amen.