

*The Waiting: The Prophecy Echoes*  
*By Jason Huff*  
*December 5, 2015*  
*Acts 3:18-26; John 5:37-47; Deuteronomy 18:15-19*

Friends, our final Scripture reading today comes from Deuteronomy 18:15-19. May God add His blessing on the reading of His holy Word. “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. 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.” 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. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.”

What does it take to really know someone? Most of you know me as a pastor, husband, father, and preacher. Some of you know me better and remember that I’m a racquetball player who plays role-playing games and likes to watch Japanese animation. Plenty more things, only my family knows. But the more we know each other, the better our relationship can become.

I know my friend Kurt is an ice fisherman, that Ben’s into running, that Ed Rapin likes to talk politics over a cup of coffee, that Rick loves everything related to railroads. These are parts of our relationship with one another. So are the difficult things – some of us struggle with our weight, while others have a difficult time praying and opening their Bible every day. But when we know those things about one another, we can be a true encourager and friend, and we benefit too. You’ll only turn to me to clear a virus off your computer if you know I can do that. I’m not going to turn to you to replace my breaks or change my oil if I don’t know you can do that.

All of this relates back to our relationship with Jesus. We think of Jesus in many roles, but rarely as a prophet. Maybe it’s because to us, a prophet is weird, almost like a fortune teller or psychic. Maybe the title “prophet” doesn’t seem like enough when describing Jesus. Or maybe we just don’t know what how the Bible defines a prophet. I am convinced that, if we know Jesus as our prophet, we will know Him better. That role is central to who He is.

Last week we talked briefly about how this Advent season, we’re going to wait for the Messiah like the ancient people of old did – by looking at the prophecies and anticipating His arrival. We learned that His coming was the first prophecy in the Bible – He is the promised seed of Eve who would crush the head of the serpent, the devil, and everything he stands for. This week, we’ll see the prophecy regarding the Messiah as a prophet.

In Judaism, there is no single figure greater than Moses. Abraham is important as the father of the nation; the prophets were incredibly important, especially Elijah. But to this day, no one holds a candle to Moses in the hearts, minds, and religious thoughts of the people of Israel. Moses sinned – he killed a slave driver beating a Hebrew slave – but even then, he had good intentions; he just didn’t act by God’s standard.

It's because of Moses that the Israelites even continued to exist. After the Israelites created the golden calf, God told Moses that He would destroy the rest of the Israelites that had sinned so greatly and make a nation out of him instead. Moses defended the Israelites, and God honored Moses' request to keep them alive. Moses led them out of slavery and to the border of the Promised Land despite all their complaints.

But most importantly, Moses spoke to God. The people were terrified of God and told Moses to stand in for them; otherwise, they'd die of fright. Moses talked to God and relayed God's law to them. The first five books of the Bible, known officially as the Torah, are also called "Moses" or "the books of Moses" because God spoke to him and through him.

While Abraham is called a prophet once in Genesis, Moses is the first person in Scripture who displays the three unique characteristics of a prophet. The first is that God speaks directly to him, and God relates His messages for His people through him. The second is that God accurately speaks of future events through him. The third is that God does miraculous signs and wonders through him. All three of these distinctions are evident in Moses. Many of the later prophets were genuine, but they didn't have all these attributes. For example, Elijah did miracles and spoke for God but didn't write down knowledge of future events in our Bible. The minor prophets were not known as miracle workers. Moses was the whole package.

So Moses comes to the end of his life, and he repeats the law to the new generation of Israelites. Moses reiterates all God's expectations and promises. In the midst of it comes tonight's passage, a promise: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." As the ancient Israelites understood it, this was a two-fold promise. God would, from time to time, raise up prophets to speak to them like Moses did. God would not leave them ignorant of Himself but would bring prophets on a regular basis to remind them of their covenant with Him.

But the promise goes deeper than that. Sometime in the future, God would raise up a unique prophet even greater than Moses – someone who would fulfill the prophetic role entirely and lead God's people forever, one who like Moses would speak to God face to face and live. When John the Baptist arrives, he is asked by his fellow Jews, "Are you the prophet?" For the four hundred years preceding Jesus, there had been no word from the Lord.

John isn't the prophet, but he knows who is – Jesus. The title "Messiah" is important, but it means "Anointed One" – a king was anointed. That title alone is not enough for Jesus. Because He's not just the King, He's our prophet. He is the One who hears from the Father and relays the Father's message to us. While Jesus is in His very essence and nature God, He is completely one with the Father.

In John 5, right before tonight's reading, Jesus says, "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He does...by myself I can do nothing." Jesus fulfills the first attribute of a prophet perfectly. Even though He is the One called Emmanuel, God with us, He speaks precisely and only what the Father says.

Jesus fulfills the second attribute of the prophet by telling what is to come. On many occasions, Jesus predicted His death and resurrection, surprising His disciples who swore they would never let it happen. Jesus foretold that Peter would deny knowing Him, even though Peter was confident he would do no such thing. And Jesus prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple – something that no one in Israel expected was even possible, since they believed God was on their side.

And Jesus fulfills the third role of the prophet through all his miracles. Moses parted the Red Sea; Elijah and Elisha did miracles as incredible as raising the dead. But Jesus goes far beyond anyone's wildest imagination! All the gospels give examples of the kinds of miracles Jesus did, many of which the Jewish rabbis believed couldn't be done, such as healing a man born blind or raising a man dead four days.

But most of the time, Jesus' miracles are summarized. In Matthew 4 and 9, Mark 1 and 3, Luke 6 and 9, we're told Jesus pretty much healed everybody He came across who was willing! He does miracles all over the place, enough so that Roman centurions and Samaritans, who were considered the lowest of the low in Jesus' era, came to see Him for help. And while many people didn't believe Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, most everyone believed He was a prophet – which is why His opponents had to arrest Him in the middle of the night and condemn Him to death before many knew about it.

When Jesus comes as a prophet, we have another puzzle piece; He is the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy about one like him coming to lead God's people. We can be confident in our faith because Jesus meets the requirements for the prophet from Scripture. But what more does Jesus as our prophet mean for us today? Is it something we just point to and say, "Yeah, I guess He was the prophet, and that's neat?" Or does Jesus being our prophet change our relationship with Him? I believe that there are several ways that Jesus as the great prophet affects us. As our prophet, Jesus blesses us, encourages us, and challenges us.

First, *Jesus blesses us as our prophet through His unique work in our lives.* In our passage from Acts, Peter quotes Moses from Deuteronomy, and then adds, "When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

This is amazing. Because the prophets could warn of God's coming wrath, they could teach God's expectations, but they had no power to turn the hearts and minds of the people to God. In fact, in John 5, Jesus says, "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."

Moses was the greatest prophet to live before Jesus, but he didn't change the Hebrews into saints. Under Moses' leadership, an entire generation of Israelites dies in the wilderness due to their disobedience to God! All the commands that Moses relayed to the Israelites were good and right and directly from God – and they brought death, not life. In the Law, in Leviticus 18:5, God says, "You shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them." No one can keep the Law perfectly – thus, every person dies.

The Pharisees Jesus speaks to in John 5 think that they are saved by being Jews and following the Law given to Moses. But Jesus says that their accuser will be Moses, will be the Law given through him! When examined against the Law, it will become clear that without God's grace covering them, they are sinners deserving of wrath.

Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the rest had no power in and of themselves to turn people around. Jeremiah was deeply depressed because he preaches and warns and prophecies and only one person believes him...one convert. Some prophets had more success. Despite his racism against the Ninevites, Jonah's words save a generation in Nineveh from destruction. Yet once that generation was gone and they returned to their wickedness, Nineveh faced God's wrath.

But Jesus is different. As our prophet, Jesus does not just tell us God's will and warn us of judgment to come if we don't turn to God. Jesus – through His life, death, and resurrection, in His prophetic role, through the work of the Holy Spirit – turns us from our wicked ways. What no other prophet can do, He does. And it's not that Jesus inspires us to turn ourselves away. No, Jesus is the One who turns us away from sin. It is His work in our lives, not only through His prophetic words but His sacrificial life on our behalf. We are blessed by our prophet because He makes our turning possible.

And that leads into the encouragement from Jesus – *our prophet came willingly to us for our benefit and the pleasure of His Father*. Hebrews 10 teaches us that when Jesus came into the world, He said to the Father, "Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will." Jesus desired our salvation; He desired to turn us from evil.

That's not something we see in the other prophets. The vast majority of the prophets were less than willing. Moses told God all the reasons he shouldn't be chosen to lead God's people, and at the end, he just says, "Please send anybody else." Isaiah's first thought when he is called by God is, "Woe is me!" Jeremiah complains about being a prophet. Jonah runs away from his calling to Nineveh.

And that's because the prophet's life is hard. Many prophets were viciously killed for calling the people out on their wickedness. And the prophets had to do hard things. Ezekiel had to lay on his side for over a year, proclaiming the 390 years of Israel's sin. Hosea had to marry an unfaithful woman. It was difficult to be a prophet, and most of them didn't want the job. God came to them and they had the job whether they liked it or not.

But we can be encouraged because Jesus willingly came as our prophet. He loves us. He rescues us. His work as our prophet reminds us that we don't serve a boogeyman ready to strike us down at our first mistake. He came to heal, and He still heals. He came to turn us from our sins, and He still does. All of His work is to restore us and make us whole. He still speaks about our future, a future alongside Him in paradise.

As we await Jesus' coming, we wait knowing His blessing is already upon us. We are encouraged because our salvation is in His hands, not our own. And that's good, because between His perfection and His love, we know nothing will keep Him from accomplishing His good purposes for our lives.

And that leads us to our challenge from Jesus – *we must listen to Him*. That's the command to us when the prophet arrives – listen to Him. It's a serious command; God said that anyone who doesn't listen to the prophet will be cut off from His people. God said not to be afraid of the false prophet, but to carefully listen to the prophet whose prophecies proved true.

This goes hand in hand with the blessing and encouragement of Jesus the prophet. If we listen to Him, we are blessed because He turns us from sin. If we listen to Him, we are encouraged of His love for us and the work He's doing in our lives. If we listen to Him, we receive joy because we get to drink in God's grace to us.

We live in a time when people don't know basic facts about God's Word, and where someone's considered a regular at a church if they come twice a month. And that's sad to me, because a key trait of believers is that we want to hear from God regularly and listen to Him. By reading His Word, by hearing the Bible discussed each week, we listen to Him. Not everything we hear will be easy. But we listen to the One who saves us.

When I was in Russia, there was email, but you had to use your telephone to get through. Remember those days? And Russian telephone lines were awful, and I had to call Moscow to send email back and forth. Catha and I were engaged, and a chunk of my day centered around trying to get letters to and from Catha. It was a hard process. But there was nothing greater than opening up my email and seeing a new note from her.

In the same way, when we turn to God's Word and listen to Jesus our prophet, we get to experience our joy in Him. When we listen, we participate in the means of grace. We don't do it because God has a book where He's writing down when we did or didn't have a quiet time or a devotional. It's because when we listen, we experience His love, joy, and grace firsthand.

Bryan Chapell, the pastor of Grace Presbyterian in Peoria, IL and former chancellor of Covenant Theological Seminary, recently talked about this subject, and what he said resonated with me. "When we [communicate] with God, we [feast] on the grace that has already been made available by Him. The joy of the Lord becomes my strength – not just joy, but greater love for Him. I [understand] more of His ways, His word, and His heart. As my love for Him grows, so does my willingness to serve ...it becomes my greatest priority because the means of grace [help] me understand how great is his love for me. My life is now a response of love. When we [participate] in the means of grace simply to drink in the grace of God...we truly [honor] Him."

You might not have ever thought of Jesus as your prophet before, but I encourage us to think that way this week. As we continue in the season of Advent, waiting for His coming, may we not only recognize Him as the prophet who was spoken about long ago by Moses, but that He is still our prophet, speaking words of truth over us, healing us and doing signs and wonders over us, and inviting us to listen to Him and receive the eternal life that He offers.