

## Sermon 4, The Prophet Like Moses, Deuteronomy 18:15-19

**Proposition:** God promised in Moses' time that He would send a prophet like Moses. He has kept this promise, and we need to listen to His prophet!

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### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this Christmas evening to another glorious mountaintop moment in the Pentateuch. I freely confess that the previous three prophecies we've looked at have been cloaked in obscure poetic language, and that you (like me) had most likely never looked to them before as descriptions of what our Jesus is like. But tonight's prophecy is different. Tonight we see, in straightforward prose, a clear prediction of a great prophet, one like Moses in speaking with God face to face and delivering God's words to the people. This Christmas day, we celebrate the day when God kept this promise, and we gather together to listen to the prophet who speaks God's words to us.

#### I. Detestable Attempts to Discover What God Wants, vv. 9-14

I want to introduce my remarks on this section with some fascinating lines from T.S. Eliot's "The Dry Salvages." Consider it, if you will, a paraphrase of this passage of Deuteronomy in the language of the twentieth century.

To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,  
To report the behaviour of the sea monster,  
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,  
Observe disease in signatures, evoke  
Biography from the wrinkles of the palm  
And tragedy from fingers; release omens  
By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable  
With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams

Or barbituric acids, or dissect  
The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors—  
To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these are usual  
Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:  
And always will be, some of them especially  
When there is distress of nations and perplexity  
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.  
Men's curiosity searches past and future  
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend  
The point of intersection of the timeless  
With time, is an occupation for the saint—  
No occupation either, but something given  
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,  
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

People want to know about the future. “Distress of nations and perplexity” is not limited to the “shores of Asia” far away; it is also found in the heart of London, “in the Edgware Road.” But as Eliot points out, though our curiosity is all about the past, the future, what’s in the cards and what the liver says and every other kind of omen and hint, we are actually made for something totally different. We are not supposed to have that kind of knowledge, the occult kind that our restless spirits long for. How much of our lives is taken up with this search for the unattainable knowledge of the future? How much do we indeed live for “pastimes and drugs, and features of the press”? The press purports to say what will happen in elections, what the long-term outcome of wars will be, whether the Dow will go up or down, whether GDP will rise or fall, whether more or fewer children will be born, and on and on and on.

Yahweh your God has not allowed you to do so! Our God calls this search for occult knowledge, especially through demons and spiritists, but also through drugs and the deep psychology that purports to reveal what ordinary mortals cannot know, an abomination.

## **II. God’s Provision of a Prophet, vv. 15-19**

It is in this context, the context of the human search for all kinds of illicit and forbidden knowledge, that God promises something better — a prophet who will tell us what we need to know.

Do you notice the same themes that we saw in this morning’s sermon, where God actually took a medium and gave a true message through him, but only after opening his eyes to see the Angel of the LORD? Well, God doesn’t take a false prophet and make him into a true one here; instead, He contrasts the false prophets with the true. The false prophets sacrifice their children to demons. They use divination, witchcraft, omens, and sorcery. They are necromancers and every other kind of a diabolical thing. God will send a prophet who is nothing like that.

### **A. What the Prophet Will Be Like, v. 15**

What is He like? What will be God’s answer to humanity’s quest for answers?

### **1. The Prophet Will Be Raised Up**

The first thing about the prophet is that he will be raised up. This is the same verb that we saw back in Number 24, also referring to the Messiah. And as before, it is saying that the one who comes back from the dead is the one who is prepared to reveal to us everything we need to know. The prophet will be raised up in two senses. First, God will establish Him as a prophet. God will reach down and pluck Him from the crowd and set Him up as the great and final prophet. But in the second sense, this is clearly a reference to the resurrection. Though this prophet will be struck down, God will raise Him from the dead. This beats necromancy all hollow. You want to know what the dead know? Talk to a Messiah who was dead, and is alive again, and has the keys of death and Hades.

### **2. The Prophet Will Be an Israelite Brother**

But not only will Yahweh raise up this prophet; the prophet will be an Israelite brother. He will be from among the people of God. He will not be a stranger; He will be one of us.

### **3. The Prophet Will Be Like Moses**

Finally, He is like Moses. In what respect? In several. Moses was notable as the great Mediator between Yahweh and His people. Moses was notable as the one who turned Israel into a nation. But above all, Moses was notable for how his prophecy was qualitatively superior to that of anyone else in redemptive history.

He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?" (Num 12:6-8 NAS)

Moses is exceptional, even unique. He alone speaks with God face to face, as a man speaks with his friend (Exodus 33:11). That is not how God spoke to any other prophet, not even to the very greatest of them like Isaiah and Elijah. This coming Prophet will be like Moses in this most important respect: He will speak with Yahweh face to face, and He will see God. To use the language of Christian theology, He will have the beatific vision at all times. The messages He brings will be from the face as well as the mouth of God.

Brothers and sisters, this is a level of communication unsurpassed in redemptive history. This is way beyond God speaking from the sky. This is way beyond God speaking from the top of Sinai. This is God taking a man out for coffee. This is the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, declaring Him.

Do you want to be in touch with the transcendent? Of course you do, because you are human. The way to do that is not to try to speak to the dead. It is not to sit down with a Ouija Board and try to get some spirit to dictate a message to you. It is not to visit a psychic or read

your horoscope. It is to pay attention to the great prophet like Moses who is in perfect communion with God.

### **B. How to Respond to the Prophet: Listen to Him!, vv. 15d, 19**

And that's exactly where Moses takes it. Since the prophet is like Moses and speaks with God face to face, you must listen to Him! There is no question about whether this prophet is accurate. There is no possible sense in which he is failing to convey the message. And therefore, you need to listen to Him.

Christmas may seem to be about worshiping a baby. True enough: That baby is worthy of all worship. But He is a grownup now, and He speaks with a voice like many waters. Don't ignore Him, blow Him off, or give Him a lower priority than the news and the pundits and your own thoughts. Listen to Him! That's what we are here to do.

### **C. The Prophet an Answer to Israel's Prayer for a Mediator, v. 16 (cf. Deut. 33:7)**

We should listen to Jesus speaking not only because He perfectly expresses and reveals the Father, but also because we literally asked for Him. There is nothing more annoying than a man who asks for a favor, then refuses to utilize it. We asked God for a mediator. Moses quotes the people's request from the base of Sinai. After they heard God speak, they said "Such messages will kill us. Moses, you be our mediator." Moses accepted their request and became their mediator. Now he says, "I can't be your mediator forever. But someone is coming who can." We cannot bear to see God in Himself, the consuming fire who is capable of reducing us to ashes instantaneously. No one wants to have a dance party on the rim of a volcano. No one wants to take a nap next to a vat of molten steel. The consuming fire is a terrifying thing. But this prophet is one who can and will dwell with the everlasting burnings. He can go to the fire and return unscathed, for He too is made of the self-feeding fire which is Yahweh. But He comes to us not as the self-feeding fire, but as a man like us, eating fish and sleeping in the bottom of the boat.

Moses himself utters this same sort of prayer for the Mediator to come in His blessing of the tribe of Judah a few chapters later: "And this regarding Judah; so he said, 'Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, And bring him to his people'" (Deu 33:7 NAS). The one descended from Judah needs to be raised up for His people. Only God can bring Him to His people, and Moses prays for that as he blesses the tribes. In other words, the need for a mediator doesn't slowly go away over time. He is just as needed today as He was last week, last year, and four millennia ago in Moses' time, for God will never change and we will never be able to stand unaided in His withering presence.

So you asked God for a Mediator. Accept the one He has granted you. Listen to Him.

### **D. What the Prophet Will Do, v. 18**

Lest there is any doubt about this one whom Yahweh will raise up, God describes His activities further. Above all, He will do two things.

#### **1. Receive God's Words**

The first is to have God's words put directly into His mouth. We say at times when struggling to quote someone else accurately, "I don't want to put words in his mouth." But that is just what

Yahweh does for this prophet. He gives Him the very words to speak. In other words, the prophet is never going off on His own to make something up. He knows at all times exactly what God wants Him to say.

## **2. Speak God's Words**

And not only does He know what God would say; He says it. He speaks to the people of God all that God commands Him. You will not miss anything if you listen to Jesus. You will not be left out of key communications. Everything that you need to know as a follower of God is something that you will learn by listening to the great prophet like Moses.

### **III. God Backs His Prophet to the Hilt, v. 19**

But here's the other thing to know: God backs His prophet to the hilt. There are blessings in listening to the prophet, but there is a punishment waiting for anyone who disregards Him.

We can and should feel free to ignore the horoscopes, blow off the omens, and generally have nothing whatsoever to do with any supposed occult knowledge. But the same is not true for Yahweh's prophet. If you do not listen to Him, Yahweh will require it from you. He will exact a proportionate penalty from you, elsewhere described as not listening to you because you did not listen to Him (Proverbs 8). Brothers and sisters, Yahweh will require it. Just as we saw that the coming Messianic King is a mighty warrior who crushes heads with His scepter, so know that His Father backs Him to the hilt. Even if the prophet doesn't curse you, His Father takes it personally when you refuse to listen.

So come to this prophet, you who labor and are heavy laden this Christmas. There is a blessing in coming. You will get in touch with the transcendent in the most transcendent way possible, and find that He is not a force or a feeling, but a man like yourself who is also in the bosom of the Father. Listen to Him, and learn

a lifetime's death in love,

Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

Amen.