

Christ the Coming One: Prophet

Deuteronomy 18:15-22

Intro: Thrilled with Christmas

Often in the Christian life, we can become so accustomed to basic Christian truths that we are no longer thrilled by them, like we should be. One reason is because we take for granted what we have. The treasures of Christianity are already ours. We have them.

I remember when I wasn't yet married to my wife and how I longed to be married to her. I just couldn't wait for that day to come. But how many times throughout our marriage have I forgotten what that was like, because now I have her. And I can become complacent with what I have.

Sometimes the Christian life can be like that. That's why I think it's a good discipline to take our minds back to what it was like before we had the things that we now take for granted.

That's what we're doing when we reflect on the first coming of Christ. We are putting ourselves

in the shoes of OT saints who were longing and waiting for the coming Messiah, who would bring the joy of salvation and usher in all the promises of God given to them.

One of the things they ached for and deeply longed for was A WORD from the Lord through this Messiah. We gotta realize that when the last book of the Bible was written—Malachi, written in about 430BC—that was the last special, direct word from the Lord to his people.

They went 400 years without hearing a single word from God. Total silence. And they were waiting for that prophet who was foretold to come.

Can you imagine being told that God would bring his word through his final prophet, who would bring to completion all the promises and prophecies God ever made? And years turn into decades, and decades turn into centuries, and there is no word from God. Would you start to lose trust/hope?

I like how one Children's Story Bible captures it (The Big Picture Story Bible). The chapter is

titled “Many Silent Years”: *Years passed without a single word from God. [It’s a dark picture of a town in Israel that looks vacant and dead and silent.] And the years turned into many years, and the many years turned into hundreds of years, and the great promises of God seemed to fade away.”* (BPSB, 230-232)

That’s the experience I want us to enter this morning, so that *when* we are reminded that the final prophet who speaks God’s very words to us HAS COME...we will treasure him all the more, and NOT take him for granted.

Intro to the Series

So if you’re visiting with us, we are taking a break from our steady diet of the book of Romans to reflect on the first coming of Christ. And to do so, we are going to focus on the threefold office of Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King.

This morning we’ll focus on his office of Prophet. Next week “Priest.” And in two weeks “King.” And then on Christmas morning (which we WILL

gather!), we'll reflect on the beauty of the birth of this Messiah.

God's People Need God's Prophet and Word

In Deuteronomy 18, we have a prophecy of a future prophet. Ever since Moses spoke these words to God's people, they anticipated the arrival of this prophet—who was like Moses, who would come from Israel, and who would speak for God.

And the reason is: *God's people need God's prophet because they need God's Word.* That's why there was such anticipation of this coming prophet—God's people need this prophet. And they need this prophet because they need God's word. That's the point of this passage. And that principle is established in this passage as it highlights *three characteristics* of God's prophet who gives God's people God's word.

Characteristic #1: God's prophet will reveal God himself. [v15] So God will call a prophet *like* Moses, who comes *from* Israel, who must be listened to. Now, why was there a need for this kind of prophet? Why is Moses telling the

people of Israel about this future prophet at this point in Israel's history? We get some insight when we consider what's going on in the book of Deuteronomy as a whole.

Deuteronomy was a book that was meant to prepare God's people for life in the promised land. Remember, God promised Israel that they would inherit the land of Canaan and experience peace and rest, because they had just come from being slaves in Egypt where there was no peace and rest. Moses led them out of slavery, and led them TOWARD the promised land, but because of their hardness of heart towards God, God made them wander in the wilderness for forty years. And that's where they are in Deut.

He gave them his law, and Deuteronomy is, in many ways, a reiteration of that law, but it includes unique aspects that are designed to prepare them for life in the promise land. And in this particular section of Deuteronomy, Moses addresses the leaders who WILL BE over Israel in the promise land—leadership, some of which, hasn't yet been established...like a *king*, as he describes in ch17. There will be *priests* and

judges. But the last leadership role he talks about is that of a *prophet*.

There's a reason why he addresses the role of the prophet last in the list of leaders. The prophet functioned as the final accountability. If the priest or the judge or the king goes off the rails, the prophet comes to them with a message from God himself to get them back in line. (Think: Nathan and David; Elijah and Ahab)

At this point in Israel's history, Moses was THE main prophet. BUT, in ch3, Moses told the people what God declared about HIS destiny—Moses would NOT lead the people into the promised land. He would die before they get there.

Now, how do you think the people of Israel would've felt about that news? Moses was their leader! He was God's voice to them! "Who we gonna listen to? Who's gonna lead us?" In fact, in the passage just prior, Moses warned them of listening to the wrong people. **[vv9-14]**

“You’re going into this land, Israel, that is filled with people who *listen* to falsehood. Don’t partake in that! Don’t LISTEN to these fortune-tellers or false prophets!” “But Moses! You’re not gonna be there! Who should we listen to?” **[v15, “listen to him”]**

They need God’s word given to them through this prophet because Moses won’t be there and false prophets will be! But that’s not the only reason they need this prophet. This prophet will not only guard them from listening to false prophets; he will guard them from listening to God himself *directly*. **[v16]**

What are they talking about? Do they NOT want to hear from God? V16 is alluding to **[5:22]**.

So this comes right after God re-gave the Ten Commandments to the people. Notice what happened: **[5:23-24]**

What do you expect them to say next? “This is amazing! God spoke directly to us! We got to see his glory! How awesome is that!” That’s NOT what they said. **[5:25-27]**

In other words, “Moses, be our mediator! We can’t hear from God directly. We are sinners, unclean, unfit... God is holy, perfect, righteous...and for whatever reason, the first time we heard directly from him, we didn’t die. We don’t wanna take that risk again. Speak on behalf of God to us, Moses!”

Does this seem odd to you? In a day when we hear of casual encounters with God, like, “The Lord spoke to me while I was shaving this morning. We had a very nice conversation.” God speaking to sinful humanity is not a casual thing.

We cannot directly receive the word of God without a mediator. BECAUSE the *word* of God is a revelation *of God*. He is bound up in his word. You cannot separate who he IS from what he SAYS—they are integrally bound together. Therefore, when God speaks, he is revealing HIMSELF.

Listen to how 1 Samuel 3:21 puts it, “...the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh *by the word of the LORD*.” How did God APPEAR to Samuel

the prophet? BY HIS WORD! You cannot separate God from his Word.

This is why God's speaking is never casual and why sinful people need a mediator. They needed another prophet like Moses...to reveal God HIMSELF.

Characteristic #2: God's prophet will speak with the authority of God himself. [18:17-18]

Did you notice the word "prophet" is in the singular? "I will raise up A prophet." Not "prophets." "I will put my words in HIS mouth...HE shall speak..." Who is this? No doubt, there was a succession of prophets who came after Moses who were like Moses. True prophets. And no doubt, they are in mind here, like, "I will continue to give you a prophet who can mediate my voice."

BUT often, when the OT uses this singular language—"prophet" or as we'll see in a few weeks "king"—there's an anticipation of a final one...the greatest one, who fulfills that office, and is the ONE for whom God's people are waiting to arrive—for what?

Did you see that language in v18? “I will put my words in HIS mouth.” What does that mean? Does it not mean: “When this prophet speaks, GOD SPEAKS!”? He will speak GOD’S words because God will put his own words in his mouth to speak them! They are God’s words! And therefore, such words carry the authority of God himself. **[v19, “MY words that HE...”]**

God will hold everyone accountable to the words coming from the mouth of the prophet because the words coming from his mouth will be put there by God and therefore they’re God’s words, and therefore, they carry the authority of God himself. God will not tolerate his Word to be dismissed or disobeyed.

Notice how this point is further confirmed in the warning to prophets who claim to speak God’s words but do not? **[v20]**

Again, another reinforcement that the true prophet speaks the very words of God, and therefore, carries the authority of God himself. So if one claims to do that, but is proven otherwise, God says, “He’s gonna die.”

God does not allow his Word to be tampered with! Claiming to speak FOR GOD but speaking that which is contrary TO GOD is a distortion OF GOD! Remember, the Word of God reveals God. They are integrally bound together, such that, if his word is twisted, he is being misrepresented.

Do you see why the Bible makes such a big deal out of rightly handling the word of God and why it so often warns us of those who would twist it?

- James 3:1, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”
- 2 Tim 4:1-4, “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

- Matt 7:15, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”
- 1 John 4:1, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Church, don’t listen to Joel Osteen. Don’t listen to Paula White. Don’t listen to Binny Hinn. Don’t listen to Steven Furtick. Don’t listen to anyone who tampers with God’s word. Because those who claim to proclaim the word of God are meant to carry the authority of God, and when they mess with God’s Word, they mess with God himself.

God’s people need God’s word, and they need it authoritatively and accurately given to them, which leads to...

Characteristic #3: God’s prophet will be as true as God himself. [vv21-22] It's pretty simple! Test to discern whether a person is a true prophet. Do their predictions come true or not? If not, don’t listen to them.

I remember a few years ago there was a pastor whose video went viral. He was claiming he got a vision in a dream that something really bad was gonna happen in a few months that would alter the course of history.

I have no doubt he sincerely believed these things were going to happen. But listen, not all false prophets know they're full of it. Many actually believe what they're saying is true. (Or they've come to convince themselves they're telling the truth.)

And lots of Christians were really shook by this pastor's "revelation" from God. Granted, there was a lot going on at that time: covid, riots, lots of division in the country. But you know what? It didn't come true!

It's amazing to me that we have such a hard time with the simplicity of this! We try to complicate it so much! Remember the guy who wrote a book called "88 reasons why Jesus will return in 1988"? You know how many copies of that book were sold? 4.5 million!

SPOILER ALERT: He was wrong. So you know what he did? He revised it to 1989 and then 1993 and then 1994.

But listen, THAT wasn't the main problem—that he kept revising it. The main problem was: Some people still believed him!

If it DOESN'T come true, it's not from God! If the prophet speaks for God himself, then his words are as true as God himself.

Who is This Prophet?

Do you see why God's people need God's true prophet? They need God's word! And they need God's word because they need God himself! We need a prophet who reveals God himself, carries the weight of the authority of God himself, and is as true as God himself.

Know anyone like that?

- John 6:14, "When the people saw the sign that [Jesus] had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!'"

- John 7:40, “When they heard these words [of Jesus], some of the people said, ‘This really is the Prophet.’”
- Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Deut. 18 and applies it to Jesus: “Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.’”
- Heb. 1:1-2, “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.”
- Matt 17:5, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. *Listen to him.*”
Deut. 18, “It is to him you shall listen.”

The words of Jesus are not suggestions. They are not principles for healthier living. They are not guidelines. They are not proverbial sayings that have a nice ring to them to give you some food for thought. Jesus taught with the authority of God himself. He is to be listened to, not ignored.

Are you tempted to compromise with sin? Listen to the words of Jesus, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But /

say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.” (Matt. 5:27-29)

Are you tempted to doubt whether you should really give your life to follow Jesus? Mark 8:31, “[Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he *said this plainly*.” Not only did predict the future with perfect accuracy, he also predicted his own death and resurrection? That’s a guy you should consider following!

Jesus Reveals God Himself

God’s people need God’s prophet because we need God’s word which gives us God himself. THIS is the amazing truth about Jesus, the greatest Prophet. He didn’t *merely* SPEAK God’s word. He IS God’s word. John 1:1, “In the

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word..." WHAT? "WAS God."

Jesus is not just another prophet among many (as Islam claims). He's not even merely the greatest prophet among many who speak God's word. He IS God's word. He is the true and full revelation of God himself! That's why we need Jesus, the prophet—he reveals God to us because he is God.

How did he reveal God to us? John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and *we have SEEN his glory*, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

God's full glory was seen by God's people in Jesus, and they didn't die! Why? Because Jesus, the very Word of God, became flesh to mediate the very presence of God. And he did so, by living a sinless life and dying for sinners and rising as our representative before God.

[Gospel]

This is why we don't have to fear receiving God's Word. Our response doesn't need to be the

response of the people of Israel, “Don’t let God talk directly to us. Mediate for us, Moses!” The true and better Moses, the final prophet has come! And when he speaks, God speaks...because HE IS GOD!

God speaks directly to us now through Christ and we see the glory of God himself and, NOT ONLY do we NOT DIE, we LIVE! We get life from his words, not death! Remember what Peter said to Jesus? John 6:68, “You have the words of eternal...” WHAT? “LIFE!” Not “death.” Clinging to the words of Jesus gives you eternal life!

Church, where do WE go to get the words of Jesus today? He’s not walking around in the flesh on earth right now. He ascended back into heaven, and he will return again. So where do we go to get the words of eternal life?

Right here [THE BIBLE!] This is one reason why I’m not convinced that the office of prophet still exists today. Can God “speak” to people outside of the Bible in such that he moves them to act in one way or another? Or can he impress upon

your heart to give an encouraging or challenging word to someone else? Absolutely!

But the question I have is: Does God speak through prophets today in the sense described in Deut. 18? A true, accurate, authoritative revelation from God himself that is binding on God's people.

My answer is: that's why we have the Bible. It captures for us the revelation of who God is for us in Christ. Why do need another "word" from the Lord? It is an ocean of treasure that shows us God! Swim in the Bible! Give yourself to the Bible. As I heard one person say, "Do you wanna hear God speak? Read your Bible. Do you wanna hear him speak audibly? Read your Bible out loud." It is the revelation of God himself.

Conclusion

That's what we celebrate at Christmas. The revelation of God himself. The prophet who reveals God TO us, does so because he is God FOR us!

Listen to how *the Big Picture Story Bible* closes out that section I read from earlier: “*God was going to end his many years of silence...And do you know how God was going to do this? ...by...humbly becoming one of his people.*”

Are you thrilled by this? Oh that may we be renewed in our thrill of such gospel realities THAT *perhaps* we have lost sight of because we *have* them...we *know* them...we’re *familiar* with them.

So let us, this Christmas season, treasure what we know and have. The Word became flesh to give us God himself.