

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-22
Sermon Title: "A Prophet Arises"

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Imagine standing with the people of Israel, as Moses is speaking to them. We know that Moses has been the constant leader of the nation for around 40 years, which is a long time to rule. Gaddafi had ruled Libya for 42 years, although Moses was much more benevolent. He has walked with the Israelites through wilderness after wilderness, until a time when the people finally reach the Promised Land. When it is time to finally enter that land that God promised his people, Moses says that the Lord God will raise up a prophet like him for the people. From one of those in the crowd, God will choose this prophet.

What is going on here? What do the people suspect? We can read to the end of Deuteronomy and discover that Moses dies, but the people do not know this yet. It sounds as though Moses is looking for a successor to replace him. Somebody else will take over, and that person will lead the people into the Promised Land. That person will continue to remind the people that God is present and deserves our worship.

What does this new prophet look like? Moses says that he will teach the people the Ten Commandments, which Moses received on Horeb or Mount Sinai. This new prophet will know God's law and teach it properly. The words of God will be placed in his mouth, so as the new prophet speaks it will be as though God is speaking directly. This prophet will always say what God wants people to hear. The words will be pure; the words will be true. The people will know the words are not true, if they do not come to pass. In other words, if another prophet tells the people that the Lord has commanded this and that, and those things don't happen, then that prophet is a fraud. He is not God's chosen representative, just as Moses was.

This is a lot to take in. Moses is apparently leaving, and somebody else will replace him. This new prophet sounds as though he will be greater than Moses, if that could be possible: for the last 40 years Moses has been a steadfast leader, wise in so many matters. God will raise up another, though, and through his greatness (that is greater than Moses' greatness) God will speak directly and truthfully to the people.

So much to take in. Could it be possible? Can God raise up such a great Prophet, so we know without a doubt that God is truly guiding us?

Every Bible commentary tells us that Moses was speaking about Jesus Christ. We can look to the bottom of our Bibles, and read the notes that tell us that Moses is predicting the coming of the Messiah, who was and is Jesus. But as Moses is speaking, the people in the crowd don't really understand what Moses is talking about. They have to trust him – they have to trust God – with these new moves that will take place.

We turn to the Gospel according to Matthew, and we read about the ministry of Jesus just beginning. Imagine things happening in real time, so we are right there in the thick of it. In real time Jesus approaches people with a message, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.”¹ What does this mean? How are things going to change, now that the kingdom of God is within reach?

The fame of Jesus spreads throughout the northern part of Israel. Towns and regions such as Galilee and the Decapolis are hearing for the first time about a Prophet who has come. He is healing all sorts of diseases. He is teaching in the synagogue with more authority than the rabbis. Jesus has students known as disciples surrounding him, and that number

¹ Matthew 4:17.

is increasing every day. Along with the twelve disciples, many more will rise up and proclaim the name of Jesus. For now, in the beginning of his ministry, people are going to Jesus in droves, looking to be healed of maladies that have plagued them for years, hoping to be transformed in some way so that life might get a bit easier.

We stand in the crowds, watching Jesus speak to people and touch their hearts. Is he really everything people claim him to be? Does he have the kingdom of God in his hands? Will he offer it to us?

Moses says someone among us God will raise up to be a Prophet. If we know anything about Jesus, we realize that he isn't one of us in the strictest sense. Sure, as we stand in the crowd of desperate people, we can see Jesus is similar to any other human being. He dresses the same way, and wears his facial hair the same way any man would. But where he is different is in his presence. He has the presence of being a son of God unlike anybody else. There is something that attracts us to him. Maybe it is the look of care on his face. Maybe it is the way he talks with us and others. Maybe it is the time he spends with us that makes us want to spend more time with him. Or, maybe the side of Jesus that makes him fully God seeps out of

every pore of his perfectly human body. We might not know what God looks or sounds like, but we see and hear Jesus, and we know God is present. God is definitely with us.

Gloria and Bill Gaither capture the scene vividly in their song, “There’s Something about That Name.”² “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,” the song begins, “There’s something about that name. Master, Savior, Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain.” It is a short song, but the ending goes, “Kings and kingdom will all pass away, but there is something about that name.”

King and kingdoms passing away might make us think of Moses, back in Deuteronomy 18. Again, we are standing in the crowd with Moses. He is basically talking about leaving us. Our leader for many decades, over mountains and through valleys, is going to leave soon. But he assures us of Another. He assures that God has everything under control. When the time comes, this Prophet will arise among us. He will not be some lofty leader living in a fortified castle or riding in a bullet-proof limo. He will be one of us without being one of us. He will walk with us down every street and alley, over every high and joyful moment in our lives, and through every low and miserable moment. Moses might be passing away and

² *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, 102.

the regime that he oversaw, but God's Leader will rise up. His kingdom will never go away. The Prophet, Christ himself, will never pass away. His love will never diminish. His power and strength will never weaken.

There is something about that name, Jesus. There is something about Christ himself. No matter what we are going through in life, we always come back to him. Have you ever noticed that? When we are in the thick of our real lives, going through happy and terrible moments in real time, Christ Jesus always seems to enter the picture. He is right there, as though he just appeared.

We cannot deny his words of peace and comfort. When he says that he will shoulder our burdens, we trust that he will. When he says he will remain with us to the end of our struggles as well as to the end of time, we cannot help but believe. When he tells us to pray for enemies and not curse them, when he tells us to walk the extra mile and give the extra piece of clothing, we might shake our heads in some disbelief, but there is no getting around the truth of his words. His words convince us, whether we want to be convinced or not. His words may convict us, whether we like that feeling or not. Sometimes we need a good

helping of humble pie, and after we swallow it we find we've learned a powerful lesson. We think we can face our problems by ourselves and discover we are failing miserably, but we turn to Christ and find the straighter path and the smoother road ahead of us.

Moses was right. A Prophet rises up and the words are true.

The people of Moses' time were facing dramatic changes in the state of their nation with a leader leaving and a new territory being occupied. Yet Moses assured them that a prophet of God would arise and wouldn't misguide the people. The people of Jesus' time were struggling with their own economic and political crises with Roman imposing new laws of taxes and commerce and religion. Yet Jesus came forward and told the people that God's kingdom was at hand, within reach. Just extend the arm and grasp it. Just extend the arm and grasp Jesus. His promises outlast any storm, and any struggle, and even outlast time itself.

The Assurance of Pardon:

Hear the good news! Christ Jesus lives and reigns in heaven above, holding the keys to death and death's dominion. Christ reigns in power with God the Father as Lord of all creation, and he tells us to not be afraid. God our Father forgives all sin, large and small, secret and revealed. We are saved from death, and life is our reward. Believe this good news. You and I are forgiven through Christ our Lord. Amen.