

January 28, 2024 – Deuteronomy 18:15-20 & Mark 1:21-28

There are a lot of prophets in the world today. Oh, you probably don't recognize them as prophets. They certainly don't identify themselves as prophets. The world doesn't label them as prophets. But they are prophets, nonetheless.

False prophets, to be more precise. If they were true prophets they probably wouldn't hide behind worldly titles and labels. But they are 100% false in every way.

You see, as I've said before, a prophet is someone who delivers the message of a god. A prophet who delivers a message from the one true God is a true prophet. Moses was a true prophet. Moses went up on Mount Horeb and received God's Word. Vast quantities of God's Word. And he delivered that Word to the people of Israel.

Delivered it to them verbally. Delivered it to them in tablets of stone bearing the Law of God. Delivered it to them in the written word of the books we now call Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Moses was a true prophet.

But there are false prophets too. And they aren't just prophets of Baal or Molech, Asherah or Mammon, like they are in the Old Testament. Because a false prophet is anyone who delivers the message of a false god. And there are lots of false gods in the world today.

For example, there is the false god of science. Science is a good thing. Science has given us a wonderful understanding of the world we live in. Science has given us technology and medicine and agriculture. Science is a great thing... until you make it a god. A false god.

And science becomes a false god because there are men and women who are prophets of science. Who proclaim scientific consensus to be infallible and unquestionable. Who insist dogmatically upon the truth of such doctrines as the Big Bang Theory and evolution. Who put their trust in the research of embryonic stem cells and cloning and gene therapies, without concern for the ethical consequences.

When science becomes a false god, then this sort of teaching and research becomes the word of this false god. And there are plenty of false prophets ready to proclaim the message.

But there are other false gods too, with their false prophets in tow. There is the false god of sexual liberation with the false prophets of pornography, feminism, homosexuality, and transgenderism shouting at the top of their lungs to hear their message of perversion.

There is the false god of greed with the false prophets of capitalism, hedge funds, and investment bankers encouraging you to hoard your wealth and gamble it on the stock market.

There is the false god of politics with the false prophets of Democrat and Republican blaming all the world's problems on the other party and insisting, "Vote for me and I'll make your wildest dreams come true."

There are so many false gods in this world. And they all have their prophets. All of them. People who are absolutely convinced that if we just listen to this word from their god, we will be happy, wealthy, and wise. Suffering will end. Prosperity will abound. Their god can solve everything if we just listen and believe.

Baal, Molech, Asherah, and Mammon may have gone the way of Zeus, Osiris, and Odin, but there are still plenty of idols around us to worship. Plenty of false gospels promising salvation.

Which is an important thing to realize. I saw a headline just this past week. Pew Research did survey recently about religion in American, as they regularly do. And once again, the single largest religious group in this country is the "nones." I don't mean "nuns" n-u-n-s. I mean the "nones" n-o-n-e-s.

Religious nones are people who don't affiliate themselves with any specific religion. Some are atheist. Some are agnostic. Most describe themselves as simply "nothing in particular." 28% of Americans are religious nones.

What religious nones have in common is that they don't think that they are religious. Many of them consider themselves spiritual. Many believe in the existence of a higher power. Many engage in civic events out of a sense morality, justice, and concern for others. But they're convinced that they don't follow a religion.

But they do. Everyone follows a religion. Because everyone has a god they worship and prophets that they listen to. Whether it's science or sexuality, greed or politics. Or maybe they've just made themselves their own gods and have become their own false prophets. Everyone worships a god. Everyone listens to prophets. Everyone has a religion.

Which is really the message that Moses is trying to get across to the people of Israel in our Old Testament lesson. Here he is, giving a final prophetic message to the Israelites. He has been their prophet for over 40 years now. But his time is coming to an end.

They are standing at the borders of Canaan. Soon, Moses will die and Joshua will take over leading the people. They will enter Promised Land, conquer their enemies, and settle down in lasting peace.

Well... that's the plan at least. In reality, it won't go quite that smoothly. Yes, Joshua will take over. Yes, they will conquer the Promised Land. But they won't have peace for very long.

No, at that point, they will search for a prophet. They will search for someone to bring them a message from god. But they won't care if it's a true prophet, bringing a message from the one true God. No, they'll quickly begin to listen to false prophets of false gods. They will be drawn to worshipping those false gods. They will do evil in the Lord's sight. And He will punish them.

He will punish the Israelites and he will punish those prophets who lead his people astray. He will raise up judges and kings and true prophets who will put those false prophets to death, along with those who listened to them.

And this cycle will repeat itself over and over and over again until finally, God fulfills the prophecy he made to Moses to it's fullest degree. Until God sends a prophet like Moses. One who does miracles as great as the ones Moses did... and even greater. One who speaks a Word from the Lord as clearly as Moses did... and even clearer. One who shines with the glory of God's radiance just as Moses once did... and even brighter.

Jesus was the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy. God kept his promise to lead his people by a great prophet by becoming that very prophet. The Word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. And it wasn't a secondhand Word from the Lord he spoke, as it was among all the prophets who came before him. No it was the Word of the Lord directly from the mouth of the Lord.

We hear in our Gospel lesson that when Jesus came, he taught with an authority that astounded the people who heard it. He didn't speak like the scribes, pretending they knew what God meant when they really had no clue. He didn't speak like the Pharisees, making up new laws on the fly, without any thought to the way they were twisting and distorting God's Word. He taught with authority.

Authority enough that even evil spirits listened to him. Moses had warned that false prophets who spoke in the name of other gods would die. But Jesus doesn't kill the false prophet. He drives out the unclean spirit that inspired the false prophet's message.

He destroys the false prophet by saving him. By rescuing him from this unclean spirit that had taken hold of his mind. By using his authority over all creation, not to destroy, but to preserve and protect and cleanse.

And so it is with that same authority that he saves you too. For he is the true prophet that Moses promised, who does what Moses did... and even greater. He rescues us from slavery to sin. He leads us through the Red Sea of Holy Baptism. Feeds us with the Bread of Heaven and Living Water that is His own Body and Blood. He guides us across the wilderness of this sinful world. And He delivers God's Word to us in all it's truth and purity because he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

And when we come to the edge of the promised land, he dies... and then lives again. Lives forevermore. So that on the last day, we will not repeat the mistakes of Israel, entering into Canaan with so much faithfulness, only to be drawn away by false prophets and false gods. No, he himself will come and gather us to himself.

He will bring us into a new Promised Land. Where the Lamb who was slain will sit on his throne in our midst. Giving light to all God's people. Preserving them in holiness. While all the earth praises the one true God forevermore. Amen.