

January 28, 2024 (Epiphany 4 B)

Deuteronomy 18:15-20
“The VOICE of GOD:”

What’s the most valuable commodity on the planet right now? Some people would say oil – others gold – perhaps stocks, bonds, real-estate, etc. You’ll get a variety of answers depending upon who you talk to. According to the One True God of the universe, on the other hand, the most valuable commodity on this planet has always been: INFORMATION.

And, people scoff, “*Pssh – according to God – where is this ‘God’ of yours Christian?? I’ve never seen him! I’ve never heard his thunderous voice from heaven, or seen irrefutable proof that he’s up there watching us!*” Well – it’s true enough that God tends to hide Himself from this world. There’s a very good reason for that: the fire of God’s perfection and the cold ice of this sinful world don’t mix. The full force of His mere presence would obliterate us. Still . . . He loves this world, and He loves humanity. He loves the un-lovable. He wants His information about eternal salvation to be sent out through the world – because He wants to rescue us, and give us life after death in His paradise.

He *tried* speaking with humanity directly. His thunderous voice boomed from Mount Sinai before millions of people – the whole nation of Israel. Unfortunately, it **scared** the people to death! They couldn’t bear His voice. That very limited glimpse of His power and perfection was too much for them and shot terror through the people. *Still – God is a master problem solver!* He came up with a way of getting His information into this world in a way human beings could handle: He would speak through prophets.

And, the true prophets all spoke the same message, and they all spoke about the coming GREAT Prophet – the One would be **Immanuel** – God with us. What the true prophets foretold always came true. He, *THE Prophet*, would be GOD in a form we can handle / the God we could relate to / the God we could touch and ask questions to / the God who could experience the hell we deserve and save us / the God who would tell us the most valuable information there is: *the way of eternal salvation.*

Moses spoke about Him in these words: **Deuteronomy 18:15–20 (NIV) 15 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must**

listen to him. 16 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.’ 17 The LORD said to me: “What they say is good. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.”

God *wanted* His **voice** to be heard in this world. God made that happen and kept all His promises. The Great Prophet came – died as the sacrifice of atonement for the world’s guilt – opened up the one path from this world to heaven – and rose again.

On Easter Sunday Jesus Himself walked along the *Road to Emmaus* with his disciples (see Luke 24:13-35) going back over the words of Scripture beginning with the books of Moses (likely speaking these very words of our text) and explaining what it all meant. In **Acts 3:22** Peter quoted these verses as he shouted to the crowds on Pentecost the most valuable information on planet earth: **“This is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord . . .”** (Acts 3:18-19) The book of Hebrews also tells us this important information: **“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”** (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Can you put a price tag on what the **LORD** has to say? Is anything more valuable than hearing the very **VOICE of God**? Is that information about salvation worth dying for? Is that information worth **killing** for? That’s a striking question – but notice what the last verses of our text have to say: **“19 I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. 20 But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.”**

Contentious words like this send our soft, modern, weak, multicultural society into a complete frenzy! *“See – anyone who actually takes the Bible as literal truth is a fundamentalist fanatic who is just as dangerous as a terrorist! They’re going to go around killing anyone who disagrees with them!”* No . . . not at all. Anyone

who takes the Bible seriously is going to examine what these words mean in their context, and in the wider context of Scripture.

God set up (through Moses) something totally unique on planet earth: a **theocracy**. God gave Israel their worship rituals, their political system, and their justice system. In that nation it was indeed a capital offence punishable by death – to speak **lies** in the name of God. False prophets are *beyond* dangerous. Only the leaders of Old Testament Israel had this command to carry out, and God indeed wanted them to enforce it (along with ALL His commands). Why? Well – true and accurate INFORMATION about God was the most valuable thing they had! The eternal salvation of the entire world was at stake – God would make sure it survived through Old Testament history.

Once Jesus came, then Israel (as a nation) has served her purpose. From the time of Pentecost (after Jesus' resurrection) God sent His chosen people **out!** He sent them OUT to proclaim His voice of truth in a world filled with lies and confusion. His Kingdom is not on a chunk of real-estate – it's in the hearts of people who love and trust Him. God no longer HAS a theocracy set up in this world, there is no need for one, nor is He interested in building another "Israel" on this fallen planet. The NT *urges* us to keep our flocks free of false teaching – but not with violence.

Yet – we can still learn a lot about Him by studying the Old Testament laws and regulations God gave His people back then. It's a fact: God has a **zero tolerance** for lies and sin. In His heavenly country there is no wickedness, pain or death / there is no homosexuality / there are no people worshipping other false gods / there are no atheists or agnostics / no one believes in "big bang" Darwin evolution over billions of years / no false teachings or teachers / everyone is perfectly on the same page and they **love** God, His truth, and His way of doing things.

Thanks to Christ, there is a way from this world of lies, wickedness, and death – to the glory, peace and perfection of heaven. By faith in Christ alone we are citizens of that Kingdom now, and we'll arrive there with fanfare and joy on the day we die. Accurate information about that salvation is the most valuable commodity on this planet.

And you have it! You have something worth more than all the oil, gold, and real-estate this planet has. *What are we going to do about that? . . .* Well, first of all:

1. **Treasure it.** Stand in awe of what you have. You have heard the very ***Voice of God*** – preserved and put into your own language, in a form you can hear, examine and study without fear. You have God's Word – spoken through the prophets, the apostles, and from the mouth of Christ the Great Prophet – who told us exactly what we need to know. Yes, that truth is still a bit scary for us. It cuts right through us. It rips us open and exposes the depth of our wretchedness and sin. It shows exactly how unworthy we are to be in God's family. But – that truth also liberates us! It brings us peace when hear that ALL our sins were cancelled out in the blood of Jesus. God speaks tenderly to us and strengthens us – filling us with peace and hope as we look forward to that incredible future He just can't wait to share with us. Open up your Bible and you've just opened up the most priceless treasure there is in this world - and it will TRANSFORM you in incredible ways. Therefore
2. **Soak it up!** What could possibly be more valuable than hearing the very Voice of God? Open it up every day and let Him speak. Hear that message proclaimed and applied to you in this very building every single Sunday. During Lent you get to hear and consider Jesus' words and actions leading up to the biggest events in all of human history: Good Friday and Easter Sunday. If the weekly Bible studies are not part of your regular routine, then ask yourself, "*What could possibly be more important than coming to hear the Lord speak?*" There **is** nothing more important. That's why God wants us Christians to
3. **Shout it out!** God knows, people RUN from His Word and are as terrified at the sound of it as they were at the foot of Mount Sinai. But – they NEED to hear it. And – we get to proclaim it! And – it's the most important work in the world! Jesus Himself the Great Prophet said, "***He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.***" (Luke 10:16)

The **Voice of God** is still speaking. It is "hidden" right there in plain sight and in a form that need not terrify us – it's right there in the WORD. Treasure it / soak it up / be transformed by it / proclaim it – for God wants to reach more souls with His incredible information, to speak directly TO them with His Own Voice, and through that Gospel to continue building His eternal family.