

## **A God Who Communicates**

### *Deuteronomy 18:15-19*

I've shared before that back in the mid-90's, Cindy and I served with Cru for a year in Hungary. We were part of a team seeking to raise up a ministry on the university campus in Debrecen. Debrecen is the second largest city in Hungary, located in the eastern part of country. Early in our time there, I traveled into Budapest with our team leader to pick up materials that we would need for our ministry. He had to stay in Budapest that day for a meeting and so I had to travel back to Debrecen alone on the train with this big box of supplies.

The problem was none of the ticket ladies spoke English and at that time I hadn't learned much Hungarian. And so I bought my ticket and I got on a train, but I wasn't sure it was actually for the right train. And so from the first moment we pulled out of the station until it arrived in Debrecen, I had no clue if I was going the right way. It was a very stressful experience over the next two or three hours as I road this train. I felt very alone.

You know what would have made all the difference for me that day? If someone who really knew about the trains and who spoke English could have come and spoken to me and assured me that I was on the right track, it would have made three hours of stress a very different thing. I would have had knowledge and assurance that would have transformed that experience.

What I experienced that day in Hungary is a kind of metaphor for what we experience in life at times. As we journey through this life we are faced with decisions and opportunities. "Should I go this way or that way?" "What's the right thing to do?" "What's right path?" "Am I on the right track?" And we at times can feel a great sense of stress from all of this, right? Well, here's the good news, God is a God who communicates. He does not leave us alone in this world to find our own way. We will see this truth today as we come to Deuteronomy 18.

As we come to this passage, let me remind you that in Deuteronomy, Moses is preparing the nation of Israel for what life will look like once they enter into the Promised Land. One of the things that the people knew was that they would be going into the land without Moses (see 1:37). He had been their leader for 40 years. How would they hear from God once Moses was gone? How would they stay on the right track? Moses assures them that God would continue to communicate and lead them.

We are going to focus on Deuteronomy 18:15-19, but I want to start reading in verse 9 for the full context.

<sup>9</sup> *"When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. <sup>10</sup> "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or*

*one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,<sup>11</sup> or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.<sup>12</sup> “For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you.<sup>13</sup> “You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.<sup>14</sup> “For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so.*

The nations living in the land practiced all kinds of things to try to connect with the unseen world and to get information. The one who does such things, God says, “*is detestable to the Lord.*” It is because of these practices that God is driving them out of the land. Israel is not to follow such practices. And they need not because God was committed to continuing to communicate EVERYTHING they needed to know through His appointed messengers. Verse 15:

*<sup>15</sup> “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.*

God will keep communicating. He will raise up *a prophet like Moses* from among them. Like Moses they would serve as mediators between God and the people. They would have access to God like Moses did. God would speak through them like He spoke through Moses. And since God would speak through such prophets, Moses says, *you shall listen to him.* And of course, *listen*, means to hear and to obey.

Now, what Moses promises here has both a near and a distant fulfillment to his original audience. The distant fulfillment ultimately came to be understood as referring to Christ. We will come back to this sense later in the message. The near fulfillment is that once Israel enters the Land, God would continue to raise up prophets who would speak for God. The text has a sense of not just a prophet, but a series of prophets.

In verse 16, Moses talks about how the role of prophet arose. It happened as the nation came out of Egypt nearly 40 years earlier when God appeared and spoke at Mt Horeb (“Horeb” is another name for Mount Sinai). Moses says:

*<sup>16</sup> “This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’*

Moses is referring back to when God gave Israel the Ten Commandments. Exodus 19 describes how on that day, Moses called Israel out of their camp and they stood at the foot of the mountain to meet God. And as they stood there Mount Sinai was all in smoke and God came down in fire. The whole mountain quaked violently. There was a sound of a trumpet that grew louder and louder. And it says Moses spoke and God answered in thunder (Ex. 19:18-19). And the people were terrified. They said that they could not continue to hear the voice of God in that way and they could not continue to watch such

things anymore. If that happens again, *I will die*. And God responded to the people's request in a positive way. Verse 17:

*<sup>17</sup> "The Lord said to me, 'They have spoken well. <sup>18</sup> 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*

The first part of verse 18 repeats what Moses said in verse 15. What is added here is how the prophetic endeavor would work. God says, *I will put my words in his mouth*. The true prophet would not speak his own words. He would hear from God and then he would speak *all that* [God] *command[ed] him*. We know from Old Testament history that God was faithful to this promise. God raised up prophets like Samuel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Elijah and many others. God put His words in these men's mouths and they spoke what God commanded them to speak.

And so as Israel stands on the boarder of the Promised Land, God is promising that though Moses will not go with them, He will continue to speak to them. He will continue to lead them. They would have no need to turn to the things the surrounding nations did because God would speak through His true prophets.

Verse 19 then is a warning,

*<sup>19</sup> 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.*

The point is that if God is communicating His truth, His will, His ways through the prophets, then to not do what the prophets say is rebellion. And the one who disobeys will be held accountable. We know from Israel's history that ultimately they did not listen to God and that eventually led to their being taken into exile. God is a God who communicates.

As we think about what we've looked at here, here's the principle: **God communicates with His people through His appointed means.** I want to take some time to think about the two parts of this truth.

First, **God communicates with his people.** God spoke through Moses. Once in the land, He continued to put His words in the prophets' mouths to guide His people. In the New Testament, God spoke through the person of Christ. Hebrews 1 says this:

*<sup>1</sup> God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, <sup>2</sup> in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*

After Jesus returned to the Father, God sent the apostles to proclaim His truth. And what they spoke was written for our instruction (Rom. 15:4). God communicates with

His people. God is a God who communicates with you. You are not left alone in this world. You do not have to figure out life on your own. You don't have to live life hoping that you "got on the right train."

Do you believe that God wants to communicate with you; to lead you; to guide you? God has demonstrated that commitment throughout history. And so as you move through this life, hold onto this truth. God communicates with His people. God did not just set this world in motion and then leave us to fend for ourselves. He is involved! He communicates!

Now, I would venture to say that for most of us as we think about wanting God to communicate with us is it often related to specific details in our lives, right? We want to know, should I take a certain job? Should I marry a certain person? Should I buy this home? I wholeheartedly believe that God wants to guide us in these kinds of issues. But I think we miss the point of God's communication if we are ONLY looking for it in these kind of specific issues.

The heart of God's communication to His people throughout history is a more general kind of communication in the sense that it is truth that applies to all His people. God's general communication is the most critical for discerning God's will for your life. It reveals who God is and what He is like. It reveals how we can know God and please Him. It is centered on revealing His kingdom and how we are to live in that kingdom in a way that honors Him.

We need to make sure that we are listening for God's general communication and not just for the specific details of our lives. In fact, I would suggest that if we listen well to the truth that applies to all of us, it will help us understand what He is saying to us in our specific issues.

Let me give you an example. Last week Steve taught about compassion for the poor. Over and over again, God has communicated through His Word that He wants us to have compassion for the poor. This is general truth that applies to all of us. There is no doubt about that. Now, suppose later this week you receive mailings from several organizations that help the poor – Compassion International, World Vision and Food for the Hungry all send you a letter. And of course you've got your *For Manhattan* envelope there as well. You've got a decision to make, right? You will need to look to God for some specific guidance on how He wants you to respond to any of these requests. But you don't have to wonder if you should even care about. From what God has clearly said through His more general communication, He has made it clear that you should have compassion on the poor. And so with that foundation of you can begin to pray about the decision. But without the more general communication it might be easy to just throw all of the letters in the trash. This is how God's more general communication speaks into the specific decisions we face.

God is a God who communicates with his people. He communicates with you!

Now, let's think about the second part of the principle – **God has appointed means by which He communicates.** If we want to hear from God, we need to pursue Him through His appointed means.

This passage offers a strong warning to Israel that is just as relevant for us today. When I read that list in Deuteronomy of practices that God calls detestable, it is as if nothing has changed in our day. Divination, witchcraft, sorcery, casting spells, mediums, spirit-ists, calling up the dead – these things are still around. These are things that people continue to pursue to break into the spiritual realm to seek information and guidance. We are to stay far from them.

In the New Testament, Paul lists sorcery in his list of vices in Galatians 5:20. Both the Old and the New Testaments consistently prohibited such things because they are not God's appointed means for communicating with us. If you are pursuing any of these kinds of things, you are on dangerous ground. These things are detestable to God. These kinds of things do not get you in touch with God; rather they open you up to the spirit world that stands opposed to God. They are dangerous. We must stick to God's appointed means. And so, what are God's appointed means?

I mentioned earlier that the statement in Deuteronomy 18:15 that God would *raise up for you a prophet like Moses* came to be understood as a prophecy about Christ. For instance, in Acts 3, as Peter is explaining to a crowd that it was the risen Christ who had healed a man he says this about Jesus:

*<sup>21</sup> whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. <sup>22</sup> "Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. <sup>23</sup> 'And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' <sup>24</sup> "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days.*

Peter understood that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18. Jesus is God's ultimate means of communication. And Peter picks up the warning of Deuteronomy 18 and says that since Jesus is God's ultimate communication, we must *GIVE HEED to everything He says*. We must listen to him.

Through Jesus, God has communicated how to know God. He has communicated how we can live a fruitful life that pleases God. He has communicated what matters in eternity. If we want to hear from God, we must get to know Jesus. We must pay attention to what he taught. We must walk as a disciple of Jesus letting Him teach us about the Father, about life, about the kingdom, about love and anything that He taught. If we miss Jesus, we miss God's core message to us.

And at the heart of how we get to know Jesus is God's Word. The Scriptures are God's appointed means by which He communicates with us about Jesus. Do you remember the account that Luke records of Jesus speaking to the two men who were walking on the road to Emmaus? These men were trying to make sense of what had just happened. They had hoped in Jesus and yet he had been crucified. But they had also heard a report that an angel had appeared to some women saying Jesus was alive. Luke writes this:

*<sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He [i.e. Jesus] explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*  
Luke 24:27

Jesus himself used the Scriptures to reveal himself to these men. 2 Timothy 3 says this about the Scriptures.

*<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

If you want to hear from God, then get to know Jesus. And the way you will do that is through the Scriptures. This is God's appointed means to communicate to us.

Now, there is much more that could be said about how God communicates with us. For instance, He has given us His Spirit to dwell within us. His Spirit guides and leads us. He has given us other believers through whom He will speak to us. He has given us gifted teachers to help us know what God is saying to us. He communicates with us through prayer. All of these things are part of God's appointed means to communicate with us. But here's the deal, God will never communicate through these other avenues in ways that are inconsistent with His Word. And so everything starts with His Word.

Do you know what this is? This is an owner's manual for my shop vac. The only time I read this is when I need some specific need like figuring out what type of replacement filter I need to buy. If I don't have a problem, I don't read this. Owners manual are like that. This is a letter from my dad that he wrote to me on Jan. 20, 1985 shortly after Cindy had come out to meet my family for the first time. After a few comments about the Super Bowl, he shares some thoughts with me about how much he liked Cindy as well as some of his thoughts on our relationship and his hopes for us. He also goes on to share some other words of affirmation. I've kept this letter and have read it a number of times because this is my dad sharing some of his heart with me. I read this because of relationship, not because of a need.

My hope for each of you is that you would not see God's Word as just an owner's manual for life that you pick up when you have a specific need. God Word is more like is letter from dad. God's Word is communication from a Father who loves us and wants to guide us in this life. And so may we seek the Father through His word. Because God, as a good loving Father communicates with us through His appointed mean.