

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

*“The law of God is **good and wise**; it sets His will before our eyes, shows us the way of **righteousness**, but dooms to death when we transgress.”* So wrote the pastor and hymn-writer, Matthias Loy over a century ago, in the hymn which we just sang - and he was **right**. The Law of God shows us the way of **righteousness** - it shows us how we can be **right** with God again. God says, *“Be **perfect**, for I the LORD your God am perfect.”* But we **can’t!** We’re **human!** We know that we are conceived and born in **sin**, and all too often we don’t even rise above **mediocrity** when it comes to following God’s commandments. Pastor Loy knew that too, and so he continued his hymn, *“The law is good, but since the **fall** its holiness **condemns** us all; it dooms us for our **sins** to **die** and has **no power** to justify.”* If we could be **perfect**, the Law could **save** us. But since *“All have **sinned** and come **short** of God’s glory,”* the Law is **not** a message of **life**. It is a message of **death** - a message which strikes **terror** in the hearts of all - a message which shows us our **depravity**, and which offers us **no solution**. Therefore, we desperately need **An Alternative To God’s Law**.

In today’s sermon text that alternative is clearly presented. God would send a **Prophet** - the Prophet - the **only** one who is capable of **fulfilling** the requirements which God demanded in His Law, and therefore, the only one who could provide us with **An Alternative To God’s Law**. Let’s take a look at how this all came about.

God gave His Law to the people through **Moses** on Mt. Sinai. It was an **awesome** and **spectacular** showing of God’s power. The people had prepared themselves to come into the presence of God by **washing** themselves and their clothes. Then they gathered around the foot of the mountain; as God spoke to Moses, and gave him His **commandments** inscribed on two slabs of **stone**. What the people saw for 40 days, was **thunder** and **lightning** in the midst of **fire** - and thick, smoky **darkness**. The mountain itself **trembled**, and as **it** shook, so did the **people**. They were **scared** - scared to **death**. There they were, standing in the presence of the Almighty **God**, and they didn’t know what He was going to **do!** From every indication - from all the **commotion** on the mountain - He certainly **appeared** to be **angry!**

The people were totally **overwhelmed** by this display of God’s majesty, and they didn’t want Him to speak to them **that** way anymore. It was just too **taxing**

for their nervous systems. So, the people told Moses, “*Let us **not** hear the voice of the LORD our God, nor see this great **fire** anymore, or we will **die**.*” They were not refusing to **hear** God, they just didn’t want Him to use that **tone of voice**. They wanted to hear Him in a **different** way - one which was not so **intense**. And God **responded** to their request. He replied, “*What they say is **good**. I will raise up for them a Prophet **like you** from among their brothers.*” Certainly **that** would be less **foreign**, and less **frightening** for the people.

God had given them **An Alternative To His Law**, but this would be their **only** alternative. Either they had to listen to His **Law**, or they would have to listen to His **Prophet**. Now, who **is** this great Prophet? God tells us that He would come **from** that nation, He would live **among** them, and He would be sent **to** them. That description could apply to **lots** of individuals, yet the people only found **One** who showed them by His **miracles** that He **was** this special Prophet sent from God - and that was **Jesus**. After Jesus had miraculously fed the 5,000, the people said, “*Surely, **this is the Prophet** who is to come into the world.*” Peter also directly applied those words to Jesus in his great Pentecost sermon. The alternative was **there** - either listen to God in His **Law**, or listen to God through His **Son**, the Prophet.

Either choice would **potentially** accomplish the same end, but only **one** makes **practical** sense for sinful human beings. The Law **doesn't** make it. It **frightens** us, or at least it **should**. Thinking about the temporal and eternal punishment which we justly deserve from God because of our sins is enough to make your skin crawl. The Law of God is **flawless** in all its points, and it stands before us full of **majesty** and **terror**. We know that we can’t live up to its standards. So, we too turn to God for an **alternative** - and we **find** it in Jesus Christ. Jesus is **not** full of majesty and terror. He is full of **grace** and **truth**.

How could the people be sure that this **less** frightening alternative would be **effective**? How did they know that Jesus had the **authority** to be **An Alternative To God’s Law**? What were His **credentials**? In today’s world credentials, training, schooling, accreditation, and certification are all very **important**. Such things help to mark the **experts** - the **authorities** in any given field. The people of the **1st** century were no different. They were looking for those things **too**, and they definitely **found** them in **Jesus**. When they saw the **miracles** which Jesus performed, they were absolutely **sure** that His **authority** came from **God**.

God also speaks to **us** very clearly through His **Son** - in fact, He speaks just as clearly **now**, as when the people witnessed His **miracles** first-hand. Jesus speaks to us as the **Light** of the world - the Light which shines forth brightly on this sin-darkened earth - the bright and morning Star - the Light which leads us to an ever deeper knowledge and understanding of the decrees and promises of God - the Light which leads us on the paths of **truth**. We **can't** keep such a Light **hidden** under a bushel basket, because over and over again God speaks to us through His **Word**, **proving** that Jesus is our Savior. Therefore, we set that Light of the world on the **highest** candlestick, so that His Light may shine into the hearts of **all** people - showing them that they are saved **not** by the deeds of the **Law**, but rather by the grace of **God**, through **faith** in Christ Jesus.

We know from the first chapter of John's Gospel that God speaks to us through His Son who is the **Word** of God, made **flesh**. As the incarnate Word of God, Jesus **is** truth, and He always **speaks** the truth. God promised to put **His words** into the mouth of His Prophet, so when Jesus speaks He tells us **all** of God's Word, and He speaks **only** God's Word. That's **important** for us, because we **need** something and Someone upon whom we can always **depend** - Someone who will remain **consistent** in a world of **change**.

Therefore, God exhorts us to "*Listen to **Him**.*" When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, the voice of the Father from heaven said, "*This is My Son whom I love. Listen to **Him**.*" And if we don't listen to **Jesus**, to whom **will** we listen? All other **prophets** will lead us to **ruin**. God says, "*A prophet who presumes to speak in My name anything I have **not** commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of **other** gods, must be put to **death**.*" There are certainly **many** such prophets in the world today - men who make a **mockery** out of religion - men who play upon the **feelings** and **emotions** of devout Christians, in order to make themselves **wealthy** and **famous**. But how **different** is **God's** Prophet! Jesus Christ made Himself **poor**, that **we** might become rich. He **gave up** His life, so that **we** might live **eternally**.

Jesus is God's own **Alternative To His Law**. He shows us that we can't be **saved** by the Law, but through **His** perfect obedience to that Law of God, Jesus now offers us an option which **will** bring us salvation. If we **don't** or **can't** listen to the Law perfectly, then we **must** listen to **Jesus**. And that brings us back again to the hymn of Matthias Loy. It would be a terribly **dismal** hymn - a hymn which tells us how perfect the Law is and how far we fall **short**, **except** for the fourth and

final verse: “*To **Jesus** we for **refuge** flee, who from the **curse** has set us **free**, and humbly **worship** at His throne, saved by **His grace** through **faith** alone.*” Friends, flee to **Jesus** for your eternal salvation, and for **help** in all the trials of **this** life as well. He is **equal** to them **all** - for He is the Lord’s special **Prophet**, who brought the Light of God’s Word into the world, and who now lives on **eternally** as a saving **Alternative To God’s Law**. Amen.