

simple: Test it. Our lesson said, *“If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken.”* To find truth, test what you hear, and see if it comes true. Let’s try it. Our world says that we people are basically good. Sin isn’t the problem. We need more education. More money. More opportunities. Then we good people will make our world a better place. Has that come true? I don’t think so! Jesus says the opposite. *“Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander”* (Matthew 15:19). Jesus says we’re sinful. That’s our problem. We’re all sinful! So who’s right? Our world or Jesus? Whose words came true? Jesus tells us the truth about our sin.

Jesus does that, though, so we can understand the truth about him. Jesus’ greatest promise was his promise to suffer and die for our sins and rise again on the third day. Over and over again he made that promise—to die and rise for us. Did Jesus’ words come true? Of course. He rose, just like he said. In fact, he appeared to his disciples and said, “Why are you so surprised? Didn’t I tell you this was going to happen?” I know I’ve said this before, but if there’s somebody who predicts his own death and resurrection, and then he actually pulls it off, I’ve with that guy! Jesus is the Prophet. Test his words. Jesus tells you the truth about you and the truth about your Savior.

It’s not true that “God helps those who help themselves.” That’s as anti-Christian of an idea as you could possibly have. Here’s the truth: *“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). We can’t help ourselves in any way. So God did it all. He saved us! It’s not true that the best you can do is “forgive but not forget.” Here’s the truth: *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our transgressions from us”* (Psalm 103:12). Whatever you’ve done, when Jesus died for you, your sin is forgiven and forgotten by the One who matters most. It’s not true that “you get what you deserve.” If we did, we’d all be in hell, right now! But we don’t get what we deserve. That’s grace—undeserved love! It’s not true that “all roads lead to heaven.” Jesus says, *“I am the way and the truth and the life”* (John 14:6). The only way to heaven is by faith in Jesus our Savior. It’s not true that “God will never give you more than you can handle.” God gives us a whole lot more than we can handle. That’s why we need God and his strength! It’s not true that you just need to “believe in yourself.” You can’t know how special you are until you realize how God thinks about you. *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God!”* (1 John 3:1). Jesus’ truth vs. the devil’s lies. Whom do you want to listen to?

I know the devil is active in our world. I know that he is doing everything he can to get you to believe in anything as long as it’s not in the Bible—even elves! But don’t be afraid of him. The devil doesn’t have any power over you, because Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior. You by God’s grace know the truth from Jesus. Even when the people around you turn to everything other God, you know Jesus’ promise: *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:31-32). Don’t listen to the devil. Listen to the Prophet.

Deuteronomy 18:14-18
Pastor Nathan Nass

4th Sunday of Epiphany
February 4, 2018

¹⁴The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. ¹⁵The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. ¹⁶For 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.” ¹⁷The LORD said to me: “What they say is good. ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. ²⁰But 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.” ²¹You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?” ²²If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

The Prophet

I read a sad stat recently about the country of Iceland. Among Icelanders under the age of 25, what percent of them do you think believe that God created the world? 0%. Isn’t that sad? Not 20%. Not even 5%. 0% of young people in Iceland believe God created the world. I suppose that shouldn’t surprise us. In our modern world, people are so much more “rational” than in the past, right? More scientific. More intelligent. “God created the world? Come on. We’ve moved past that!” Except, that study also found something else. 54% of Icelanders believe in elves. It’s really not a matter of reason or science, is it? “God create the world? Crazy!” “Tiny, invisible elves? Of course!” It’s amazing what people are willing to believe as long as it’s not found in the Bible.

That is proof that the devil is real. The devil—Satan—wants nothing more than to pull you away from Jesus so that you end up in hell like him. He’s bad! Sometimes, the devil uses open warfare, like demon possession. That was the case in Jesus’ day. Demons possessed people. But that’s not the devil’s only method. He’s good at secretly spreading lies and false teachings to lead people away from God. Like a cancer that’s most dangerous when you don’t know it’s there, the devil and his false ideas slowly seep into a culture, slowly seep into Christianity, until there’s no faith in Jesus left. It sounds like the devil’s been active in Iceland. Slowly, subtly leading people to hell. Isn’t that scary? Open warfare or secret lies? How does the devil most often work among us?

Moses got this. He knew how the devil works. He knew that Satan was going to try to lead God’s people astray with false teachings. So as the Israelites were about to enter the

Promised Land, Moses said, *“The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so.”* The Israelites were the only people who believed in the true God. Can you imagine that? They were always the minority. Moses knew there would be tremendous pressure to give in and believe the devil’s lies like everyone else, but Moses said, “Don’t do it!”

How big of a deal was this? Did you hear what was to happen if people spread false teachings? *“A prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say...must be put to death.”* Death! Do we take false teaching that seriously? The most dangerous person in the world for you is the person who pulls you away from Jesus. Earlier in Deuteronomy, Moses says that even if your own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend entices you away from God, do not listen to them! (Deuteronomy 13:6-8). This is serious! The devil is really good at spreading lies. Good at leading people away from Jesus to hell. We need the truth from God!

But there was a problem. The Israelites had learned that they couldn’t speak to God face to face. That might sound surprising, but here’s why. When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, he descended on Mount Sinai in a cloud with lightning and thunder, and the people were so terrified that they shouted: *“Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God..., or we will die.”* When they saw God’s presence, they realized how sinful they were. As good as you might think you are, you will have no doubt about your sin when you stand before God. Sinners like us can’t speak to God face to face. They knew it. They needed someone else to speak to them. Do you know what God said? *“What they say is good.”*

So how were they supposed to know the truth? If the devil fills the world with false teachings... If they were too sinful to speak to God face to face, how could they ever know what’s true? Moses promised: *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.”* God would raise up prophets. And he did! God gave his people prophet after prophet to tell them God’s truth. Can you name some? Samuel. Elijah. Elisha. Isaiah. Jeremiah. Ezekiel. Daniel. Hosea. Joel... They were to listen to God’s prophets speaking God’s Word! That’s how they could know the truth.

But even with all the prophets God sent to the Israelites, God’s people understood that Moses was talking about someone even greater. God didn’t say he was going to send prophets. He said that he was going to send a prophet—one prophet. The Israelites waited and waited for him—for over a thousand years! When John the Baptist started preaching, lots of people went out to him. Do you remember what they asked? *“Are you the Prophet?”* (John 1:21). What did John tell them? “No. He’s coming!” But here’s what Jesus told the people of his day: *“If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me”* (John 5:46). What was Jesus saying? “I’m the Prophet who came to tell you the truth from God!”

Can you see how Jesus is the Prophet whom Moses promised? *“...from among your own brothers,”* Moses said. They couldn’t speak to God face to face, so God hid himself in Christ—our Brother—to speak to us. *“I will put my words in his mouth,”* God promised. Af-

ter Jesus drove out the demon in our Gospel lesson, the people were amazed and said, *“A new teaching—and with authority!”* (Mark 1:27). *“You must listen to him,”* Moses said. *“Everyone on the side of truth listens to me,”* Jesus told Pontius Pilate (John 18:37). Jesus showed his power over the devil when he drove out demons. He showed his power when he preached God’s truth. He’s the Prophet. So listen to Jesus!

Because the devil is still working hard in our world. You don’t have to go to Iceland to realize that. The devil is seeping lies into your life, and he hopes you listen to them instead of listening to Jesus. Let’s try a little test. I’m going to list off some well-known religious sayings, and I want you to tell me whether or not they are from the Bible. Understand? “God helps those who help themselves.” From the Bible? No. “God will never give you more than you can handle.” No. “You get what you deserve.” No. “God is love.” That actually is in the Bible. “Forgive but don’t forget.” No. “All people are basically good.” No. “All roads lead to heaven.” No. “Just believe in yourself.” No. In fact, most of those sayings are the opposite of what the Bible says about sin and grace and faith in Jesus.

But those are just little differences, right? “To each his own.” Except, what did God say to the Israelites? *“He must be put to death.”* Now, I’m not telling you to go and put anyone to death. But this is serious! There is nothing more dangerous than the person who pretends to be speaking the truth from God but is leading us away from Jesus. God says, *“If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.”* That’s a warning! God is going to call us to account. When I don’t listen to what Jesus says, and when I don’t realize the dangers of the devil’s lies around me, I am in danger of missing out on the truth and suffering forever in hell with the devil.

We see this even in Jesus’ own life—the way the devil subtly tries to pull us away from God. There was a time when Jesus’ own mother Mary and his brothers thought Jesus was out of his mind. So they went to “take charge” of him. Think about that: Jesus’ own mother and brothers were used by the devil to try to stop Jesus. Do you know what Jesus said? He turned to the people listening to him and said, *“Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother”* (Mark 4:34-35). Do you think those words hurt Mary? I bet they did! But it’s not okay for even your mother to stop you from getting close to Jesus!

Here’s another example: Once, when Jesus started talking about his death, Peter rebuked him and said, *“Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!”* (Matthew 16:22). Peter wasn’t going to let Jesus die. Remember what Jesus said? *“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men”* (Matthew 16:23). Wow! Jesus called Peter, “Satan.” Why? He was getting in the way of Jesus’ suffering and dying for us. And anyone who tried to keep Jesus from suffering and dying for us was on Satan’s side. Because this was Jesus’ purpose: To die to save us from our sins. That’s the truth from God—the Gospel!

But how do we know that’s true? How do we know that what Jesus says is true? It’s