

Sermon 59: Beware of False Teachers: Matthew 7:15-20

Text: Matthew 7:15-20 "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them..."

Introduction: These verses are Christ's final thoughts in the sermon.

- **Enter the narrow gate into the Kingdom: 7:13** "Enter ye in at the strait gate..."
- **Beware of false teachers who present a false message: 7:15** "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves..."
- **Be sobered by the fact that not everyone who says Lord, Lord will enter the Kingdom: 7:21** "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven..."
- **Do not build your life on substitutes to God's word: 7:26** "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them no, I will liken him unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand..."

Summary: Christ warned His disciples to be on guard against destructive false teachers providing a standard to judge their teaching and comfort that truth and justice would ultimately prevail.

Truth 1: Vigilance: Christ warned His hearers to be on guard: 7:15

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves..."

- **Three principles:**
 - **We need to be realistic about Christian teachers:** "Beware of false prophets..."
 - We need to learn to be critical of the things we hear.
 - Claims to speak for God must be verified according to the standard of scripture.
 - Deviations from that standard can have terrible consequences.
 - **False teachers can look very innocent:** "Which come to you in sheep's clothing..."
 - We cannot make truth judgments by appearance or demeanor.
 - Lies can come in many different forms.

- Things that are presented as innocent can be highly destructive.
- **They will be highly motivated, extremely dangerous and can cause excessive damage:** "Inwardly they are ravening wolves..."
 - False teachers are often very aggressive and highly motivated.
 - Sometimes people who have the truth are more passive than false teachers.
- **Examples of Christ's warnings in the sermon:**
 - **False teachers will revile you because you expose and resist their teaching: Matthew 5:11** "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake..."
 - **Their teaching will lead you to eternal destruction if it is embraced: Matthew 5:20** "I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven..."
 - **Their teaching is powerless to transform people who build their lives upon it: Matthew 5:48** "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect..."

Truth 2: Discernment: He provided a test for his followers to utilize: 7:16-18 "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit..."

- **Two Principles:**
 - **The true nature of a teacher's theology will be revealed in the lives of those who embrace his teaching:** "Ye shall know them by their fruits..."
 - There is always a downstream effect from the ideas people present.
 - The culture of a group of people is shaped by the ideas that permeate the group.
 - This is true in families, communities, work environments, and religious institutions.
 - **Sound theology produces godly people, and false teaching produces hypocrisy and carnality:** "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit..."
 - Truth sets people free.

- Lies enslave people.
- Truth leads to spiritual transformation and human flourishing.
- Lies lead to enslavement, darkness, contention, and entanglement.
- **Examples of this truth in the sermon:**
 - **Animosity: Matthew 5:11** "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake..."
 - **Hypocrisy:**
 - **Matthew 5:19** "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven..."
 - **Matthew 6:1** "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them..."
 - **Matthew 6:5** "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward..."
 - **Matthew 7:3,5** "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye... Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye..."
 - **A low view of God: Matthew 6:7** "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking..."
 - **Cultural Accommodation: Matthew 5:21-22** "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you..."
 - **Greed: Matthew 6:24** "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon..."
 - **Anxiety: Matthew 6:25** "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

Truth 3: Justice: He provided a comfort that truth and justice will ultimately triumph: 7:19 "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire..."

- **Three Principles:**
 - **God will eventually confront false teachers:** "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down..."
 - **They will face eternal destruction:** "And cast into the fire..."
 - **This should provide great comfort:** "Beware of false prophets, which come to you..."
- **Examples of this truth in the sermon:**
 - **Matthew 5:3-12** "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake..."
 - **Matthew 5:12** "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."
 - **Matthew 6:18** "Thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly..."
 - **Matthew 6:30** "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"
 - **Matthew 6:33** "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you..."

Applying these truths:

- Truth is shaped by an unchanging standard.
- God's nature and purposes are that standard.
- Any deviation from that standard will result in natural and necessary consequences.
- Teaching that consistently conforms to what is true will provide a context for maximum human flourishing and transformation.
- We cannot allow ourselves to be deceived by people's tone, demeanor, or projected motives.
- We must learn to judge the content of a person's teaching by its conformity to the standard of scripture.

- We must learn to anticipate real life consequences for good or evil to flow from the ideas people embrace.
- Let's be a discerning people who love the truth, live the truth, and contribute to the establishment of a truth shaped culture wherever we have opportunity to contribute.