Who Will Lead The Way? — Delivery Transcript

Matthew 7:15–23 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, July 19, 2026 · *Two Ways*

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All right. Thanks to the team for leading us. Indeed, it was a great time of worship. Thank you for singing.

Enron

In 2001, there was a company by the name of Enron. It was the seventh largest company in the world[1] at that time. Six years in a row, it had been voted as the most innovative company in the world.[2]

And the experts on the television, on CNBC and other talking heads, said that there was nothing stopping this train. They could do nothing wrong. Twenty-six thousand or so employees, many of them pumped their life savings into the stock. It had skyrocketed up to ninety-six dollars a share.[3] And it seemed as though the sky was the limit and nothing could go wrong.

And the executives were of course preaching their company, preaching their book, saying, "Everything's great. Everything is awesome." And it looked that way from the surface. They showed their books to the marketplace. Of course, everything looked fine. But they had two tricks to bolster the good things and hide the stuff they didn't want anybody to see.

One trick was what's called mark to market, where you count tomorrow's profits today. They assumed that certain revenues were going to come in, and they went ahead and put them on their books, and they were sizable. And the other thing is that they created a series of shell companies to conceal a lot of the leverage and bad debt that they had amassed.

And so from the outside looking in, everything looked awesome and very, very safe. And so it was no wonder that everybody had such great confidence, and the executives gave them reason to think so. What was not known at that time is what was really going on beneath the surface. And eventually a reporter, a curious little reporter, began to ask some difficult questions.

And as those questions beget more questions and the thread began to pull, the executives of Enron knew that the time was limited. They still preached confidence and, "Hey, keep giving your money." All the while, they were unloading the very stock that they said was trustworthy. And then eventually the bottom fell out from underneath them and the stock plummeted from ninety dollars a share down to twenty-six cents.

And the worst part about it is the employees. At that time, they were locked out of their retirement accounts, and so they couldn't sell the stock. And they watched as thirty years' worth of savings evaporated. Thirty years evaporated in thirty days.

And it's a lesson, I think — a painful lesson — in the nature of confidence. Confidence is great. You should be confident. We just read a passage, don't throw away your confidence. **But your confidence is worthless if it's wrongly placed**, and that's the story of Enron. Of course, the executives went to jail, rightly so, and that story is a warning for a lot of companies today. Unfortunately, probably not many of them heed it.

Setting the table

But I'm not here to talk about finance this morning. I'm here to talk about Jesus, and Jesus gives a very similar warning around misplaced confidence, and he does so at the conclusion of the most famous sermon he ever preached, and we call it the Sermon on the Mount.

It's in Matthew five to seven. So if you have a Bible, that's where we're going to be. We're going to be in chapter seven, verse fifteen. And as I mentioned, we're at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, which — every good sermon, once it gets to a conclusion, is going to call people for a response.

And Jesus has been preaching about the need for kingdom righteousness. He's been warning that this righteousness is unique. It's not like the religious establishment that was very focused on external behavior. Jesus was essentially saying God's kingdom isn't about religious rituals and rules; that God did give the law to Israel, and that that law had a purpose. But they had abused the original purpose and, as a result, had missed God's heart.

They were using the law as a ladder to try to climb up to God through moral striving. Some of them were using the law as a hammer to beat people up who weren't as moral and righteous as them. And the entire time, they were missing God's original purpose in the law — the Old Testament is what we call it.

It wasn't to encourage people to try to earn their way to heaven. It was given as a mirror of God's covenant love and mercy, and that God had chosen a covenant people, but he had chosen them by his grace. It wasn't because they were somehow deserving of it or somehow could earn it.

And all of those prophets and priests and kings, they were signs and symbols of someone to come — a better prophet, the promised child of Genesis three fifteen. And when Jesus comes on the scene, his teaching is basically this: "I am that Messiah. I'm that covenant promise, and you will never inherit God's kingdom unless you do so through me." And of course, they got him crucified. And many people rejected him.

What we see at the end of the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus calling people to that response — to trust in him, to determine what life do you really want. Last week, the question was, what life do you want? It was a question between two roads, a road to life and a road to death.

This week is a warning, and Jesus is going to raise a different question. **The question that we're going to answer this morning is, who is going to lead you there?**

Human beings from birth, we are helplessly imitative. We look up to people and then we follow them and try to do the things that they do. I know this is true of siblings. I had two younger brothers. They couldn't wait to be like me. I loved it. I never really believed that, but my mom always said it. That was definitely not a good model to look up to. But I'm okay now. Thank you, Lord.

All of us look at people who we think have their lives together. We listen to what they say, maybe learn from their teaching. And Jesus knows that, and Jesus knows there were a lot of people following the religious establishment — the Pharisees, the scribes, the people who knew God — and they were following them. And Jesus was concerned that in their following of those people, they were going to be led to hell, and so he offers up this warning about false prophets and counterfeit religion.

And the thing about abundant life that Jesus came to bring is that that abundant life has many counterfeits that are in the world today. Back then, the counterfeits looked one way. Today, the counterfeits look different. **But if you are going to live an abundant life, Jesus is saying there is a warning that you must heed.**

The text — Matthew 7:15–20

And so this morning, I want to look at that warning out of Matthew chapter seven, verses fifteen down to verse twenty. And so Jesus says in verse fifteen:

> *"Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves. You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs gathered from thistles? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and neither can a bad tree produce good*

> *fruit. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. And so you will recognize them by their fruit." — Matthew 7:15–20 (CSB)*

So again, Jesus is giving a warning about false religion, about those who lead it, and about how deceptive it can be.

Watch and don't stop watching

And he begins with this verb, to beware or to keep watch, and it's different than the verb last week, which was a verb of command as well. Last week was a one-time action of entering the narrow gate. But after you enter that narrow gate, it's not as though your job is done. **Jesus is saying, after that, you need to keep watch — which is a way of saying watch and don't stop watching.** Keep looking all the time.

Because there are in the world today — and not just in the world out there, but even within the church and in your closest circle — people he calls false prophets. And he says that these false prophets are going to come to you. It's not as though you can shield yourself or put yourself in a domain in which they won't visit. They will come to you because their intention is to take and to steal, and they are looking for prey on whom they can devour.

Counterfeiters go where the value is

And the way that these false prophets work is that they speak for God. That's what a prophet is. A prophet is someone who speaks for God. And the thing about speaking for God is people value what God says. **That's why counterfeiters counterfeit that — because they counterfeit things of value.**

I've never seen any kind of counterfeiter counterfeit pennies or nickels. Have you ever seen a counterfeit penny or nickel? I don't think I have. But they do counterfeit big bills, like hundreds and fifties, or even bigger bills than that. I'm not even sure how high they go. **Counterfeiters go where the value is. People value what God says, and so people counterfeit his voice.** And it has always been that way, and it always will be that way.

Those who lead it conceal their true intentions

And Jesus is saying, "You need to keep watch because they don't look like they're that dangerous." They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ravenous wolves. **So you need to watch out for false religion and watch out for those who lead it, because those who lead false religion conceal their true intentions.** They conceal their true intentions because what they want isn't what they say.

And he uses the analogy of a wolf wearing wool. It's kind of a silly analogy, but it makes the point. On the outside, from the surface, it doesn't look as if they're that dangerous, but their motives Jesus describes as ravenous.

In fact, I think the CSB says the word "ravaging." There's a difference between ravaging and ravenous in our English language. I think the ESV and King James "ravenous" actually better captures what's going on in the original language. The idea is that these wolves are starving for something. They are driven by this appetite, this emptiness in their soul. And in the process of trying to quench that longing, they destroy their prey.

If you think about a wolf that hasn't eaten — or around here, coyotes. In fact, I didn't have to guess. We had some lambs this year, and one of them was actually eaten by a coyote. And it was one of the grossest things I've ever seen. It's just terrible destruction to the carcass of that poor little lamb.

And that is the image that Jesus is trying to create of false teachers. They may say they're wanting to help you and serve you. They may say they want to connect you to God, but their true intention is to steal from you, to harvest you, to consume you, and destroy your life. They're ravenous wolves, and so you got to beware.

What they wear doesn't change who they are

And the truth is, nobody would knowingly let that kind of person into their life. If you knew someone was going to rob you or steal from you wouldn't let them in. If you knew there was an actual wolf on your porch, you probably wouldn't say, "Hey, you know, I got some dog food." You wouldn't do that. You would say, "No way, Jose."

The only way you would do that is if you didn't think they were a wolf — if you thought they were quite innocent and maybe going to even be someone good and positive. And what Jesus, I think, is trying to establish for you and me is that **what a person wears does not change who they are**, and this is true especially as it relates to people you listen to.

Today, with the internet and YouTube, false prophets have a wider distribution than ever. **All you need to shape someone's life is a microphone and a somewhat persuasive opinion and an internet connection.** And there are all manner of people out there saying all sorts of different things, and they present themselves as knowledgeable and innocent, and people who have your best intentions.

But Jesus is saying **a wolf can wear the wool, but it cannot change its nature** — and that you can wear whatever clothing you want to wear, but all clothing does is cover up your body. The clothing that you wear cannot change your nature, and when it comes to these

false prophets, their nature is ravenous. They are wolflike. They are like their father, the devil. They come to kill, steal, and destroy. And so keep watch.

They don't attack the truth — they twist it

Now, I'm not going to name-drop from the stage every ravenous wolf that I think exists, because I think what Jesus is giving us is a better way to spot the counterfeit. The way that Jesus tells his disciples to spot the counterfeit is with this analogy of good trees and bad trees. And he says, "A good tree can't produce bad fruit. A bad tree can't produce good fruit." **The way that you know what a thing really is, is by looking at the fruit.**

The thing about wolves is, though they may look good from the appearance, they're going to, in their teaching, have a tell.

The way that they train bankers and people who deal with money to spot a counterfeit is by drenching them and surrounding them with the reality of true money. And so they tell them what true money looks like, how it feels, the little things that are present, and then the other things that are never missing — the ribbon here, the little knick-knack there. There's a whole rhyme and reason to it. And they train people in the true money so that when false money shows up, they just kind of have a sixth sense that that's not the way it needs to be, that there's this little trigger in them because they've become so deeply familiar with what is true.

And when it comes to false prophets, the way that they normally work is that **they will take something true and twist it just enough.** They will take what looks real and introduce little lies, because it's hard to beat the truth head-on with a head-on lie. The truth is much too powerful. So the way that liars work, the way that false prophets work, is they take the truth and just twist it.

This is all the way in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis chapter three, Satan doesn't tempt Eve with outright evil. He says, "Did God really say?" He adds to the word of God. "He said, 'Don't even touch it'? Are you sure you can't even touch it?"[4] He makes subtle little shifts such that it perverts the word of God.

And the thing about false teachers is they do not want to diminish God's authority. They need God's authority so that people will do what they say. **Instead of diminishing God's authority, they channel it and leverage it, and they twist what God says just enough so that it suits their purposes instead of God's.**

And that's the way you need to think about false teachers today, and you need to question everything — even me. Even, especially me. Well, if you trust me, especially me. If you don't trust me, like everybody else. But it's the people that you trust. It's the people that you think

look innocent and couldn't, wouldn't do something like that. That's the way that wolves always function. They come in sheep's clothing.

Beware of false prophets. They hide their true intentions. What they wear doesn't change who they are. And you need to develop your sixth sense of when people twist the Word of God, so that when they say what they say, you just kind of intuitively know: yeah, what they said is true, but they're leaving something out. And what they're leaving out really, really matters.

Yeah, they're preaching abundance, but there's no repentance, there's no cross, there's no sacrifice, there's no resurrection of Jesus. **You can preach the gospel and preach a false gospel if the gospel that you're preaching only includes one half.** And that's the way false prophets work today, and that's why you need to be careful, because if you adopt that kind of false religion, the consequences are eternally disastrous.

The way it looks — grapes and thornbushes, figs and thistles

And that's where Jesus goes next. **The second danger of false religion is not just those who lead it, but it's the way that it actually looks.** And the way that false religion looks can lead people astray.

And to help you see this, Jesus gives an analogy in verse sixteen. He says, "You'll recognize them by their fruit." And then he raises the question, "Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles?"

Now, I got to admit, I don't know what all these plants are, and so I had to actually study this week. No, I'm kidding. I study every week. But I studied a lot of horticulture and botany and all that stuff, and I was just blown away by how long a rabbit trail that actually was.

The word translated "thornbush" is any kind of thornbush. I think of a mesquite tree when I think of a thornbush. You guys know what a mesquite tree is? It's a bush that has pokey thorns. We don't know exactly which thornbush Jesus had in mind, but a lot of people assume it's the Palestinian buckthorn, because the Palestinian buckthorn has berries that look very similar to grapes.

If you think of a bunch of grapes, and then you look at this buckthorn berry, it would be easy to be deceived that they're exactly the same thing — except they're not the same thing. If you eat a bunch of grapes, they're juicy and delicious and full of vitamins and antioxidants. If you eat these berries, they're very tart and bitter, and if you eat too many, they act like a laxative, and you're going to get a tummy ache. You're going to be in a bad way if you ate these berries. And that means they're not good for you, and they're also full of thorns. The trellis

on which this fruit is born is full of thorns and things that will draw and drain your blood, whereas grapes are not thorny, and they just feed your body.

And so the point, I think, Jesus is saying is the appearances can look deceiving. **You don't want to determine whether it is or it isn't just based on what you see. You really want to examine the fruit, because the fruit is where the difference lies.**

And then he uses the second analogy of a thistle and a fig. A fig tree, if you've never seen one, is a tree that grows figs. And then a thistle — you might think of a sunflower plant. The guy north of us, the field north of us, he grows wheat every year. And this time of year, sunflowers just randomly come up all over the place. It's great for dove hunting. Too bad I can't hunt his field.

But you think of a sunflower — what do you imagine? Well, the stalk is prickly and pokey, but it's kind of beautiful, right? They're big. They're loud. The flower blossoms for everyone to see. Whereas what's going on with a fig is the reverse.

The flower of a fig, you never see it with your eyes, because the fig flowers internally in what's called this syconium. This is really the Greek word — *sycon* is what Jesus uses. That's what botanists call this outside green flesh that contains the fruit inside. But this fruit inside is actually not even fruit. It's many, many, many little flower petals. And there is a wasp uniquely made by God called a fig wasp, and that wasp is uniquely small enough to enter this little hole. And once it goes into that little hole, it pollinates the flowers, lays its eggs, and then it dies, and then the eggs hatch, and then they pollinate. And what happens is this outer shell swells, and the flower petals swell, and they become the fruit.

And so when you're eating a fig, you're eating a garden of flowers. You're not eating one flower. You're eating I don't know how many.

And I think the point that Jesus is making is those are two types of a fruit. **One is outside, loud, look at me. The other is beneath the surface** — and it services the main point that he's been making in the Sermon on the Mount. It's not about just the external behavior, the religious rules and rituals. And when you do good works, you don't want to do them to be seen by men. Rather, you want to go into the secret place to do prayer and giving and fasting before your Father in secret.

In other words, **the transformation of a Christian should come from the inside out, not outside in.** And that's the danger of false religion. The danger of false religion is the way that it looks, because from the outside, you can't really tell the difference.

"Lord, Lord, didn't we..."

Jesus uses some examples to help make this point. They're actually listed in verses twenty-one to twenty-three. A lot of people treat verses twenty-one to twenty-three as if it's its own section, but I think it is part of this unit. Because the natural question for me, at least, when I read his analogy is, well, how do you know whether a tree is good? And in what way is false religion similar?

And Jesus gives two examples of the similarities between true and false religion, and they're mentioned in this little prophetic word about the day of judgment. And so he says in verse twenty-one:

> *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but it's only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we drive out demons in your name? Didn't we do many miracles in your name?' But then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers.'" — Matthew 7:21–23 (CSB)*

Now, it's hard to read that passage and not get a little unsettled. At least I do, because you naturally wonder, how do I know that's not going to be me? I mean, I try to serve the Lord. I confess Jesus as Lord. I thought that's what you were supposed to do. I thought that's what you do to go to heaven. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved.

And yet Jesus says, "You call me Lord, Lord, but you will not inherit the kingdom, and I do not know you." And so it is unsettling, and we need to try to examine this in light of its context — because the context is a warning about false teachers and about the danger of false religion. The context is a parable about two different kinds of trees, and fruit that looks similar from the surface but that is actually fundamentally different.

The words can sound sincere, the works can look impressive

And so what is true of false religion? Jesus says at least two things.

Number one is what they say. They say Jesus is Lord. To say Jesus is Lord is theologically correct. It could be a nod to his divinity. It's at least a nod to his authority. And notice they don't just say "Lord," they say "Lord, Lord," which is a Middle Eastern way of saying something with emphasis and real affection. It's saying — just like Jesus said, "Martha, Martha" — a way of kind of showing her his love and compassion. When these people say, "Lord, Lord," they're saying it with sincerity. They really believe that Jesus is Lord, or at least they're saying it to convey that they really believe it.

And it's not just what they say, it's also what they do. They mention three different types of ministry that were very common in the first century. One is the ministry of prophecy, which you might think of what I'm doing right now — a ministry of teaching and preaching and saying, "This is what God says." They also had the ministry of demon exorcism. That sounds fancy, but essentially it was just relieving people of spiritual oppression. You might think of our biblical counseling ministry as a form of that, where you take people who are in deep bondage and hurt and pain, and you're helping deliver them from that with God's Spirit and God's truth. It probably looked different in the first century — and I'm not saying those weren't demons — but I'm saying there's similarities between what they looked like then and look like now.

They also were able to perform miracles, which is impressive in its own right. And what's crazy to me is Jesus doesn't say, "Your false miracles." These were real miracles. These were very impressive, and Jesus gives them their due. They said, "We did it in your name," and Jesus doesn't say, "No, you didn't." So I take that to mean their ministry, the content of their preaching — it was legit, it was helpful, it was fruitful by worldly standards.

And so when it comes to false religion, there's two things you need to know. **The words can sound sincere, and the works can look impressive.** You do not want to put your confidence in those things, because if your confidence is in what you say or what you do, there is a form of religion that can deceive you. It can deceive you into thinking, "Well, I said all the right words," or it can deceive you into thinking, "Surely God wouldn't bless me like this if I wasn't truly his."

It doesn't matter how many baptisms they have. It doesn't matter how large their church is. It doesn't matter their social reputation. Those things are not what determine the true from the false.

And today, this looks pretty similar to the way it looked in the first century. There's a lot of people in church today who find their confidence in a religious ritual that they went through, or maybe a certain set of words that they spoke. In Baptist land, it's sometimes called the sinner's prayer. And I'm not downing the sinner's prayer — I use the sinner's prayer when I do evangelism. But the idea that because I said a couple of sentences out loud with my mouth, somehow magically God is forced to convert me because I said the words — that kind of idea is not in the New Testament. What true conversion is isn't just saying a few words.

Or some others will point to their baptism — and maybe even more so in other traditions that have this belief that it is the ritual itself that saves you, that it's the ritual of religiosity that washes away my sins. And I think what you would see from Jesus here is that those actions are not what save you. **It's not the words that you say. It's not the works that you perform.** The thing that determines the genuine from the not genuine is this fruit that

God is after — this spiritual fruit that comes from a good tree. And when that is not present, then that shows that the tree is bad and all the fruit that comes from it is bad as well.

Beware of worship that neglects the will of God

And so I would encourage us, as we think about this, to beware of certain forms of worship when those forms of worship neglect the will of God.

You notice what Jesus says in verse twenty-one, I think it is. They said, "We did this. We did that." The word "do" is used seven times. "We do, do, do, do, do," and Jesus says, "Yeah, but you didn't do. You didn't do the one thing that mattered. You didn't do the will of my Father in heaven."

And so beware of worship that neglects the will of God — that maybe looks good on the outside, that maybe has impressive metrics. You think, "Man, I got to go to heaven. I'm in church like this." That may not be so. **The words and the works are not where the confidence should lie. The confidence should lie somewhere else.** You want to engage in worship that does the will of the Father.

What it lacks will keep you out of heaven

Which of course raises the question: what is that will? What is the will of the Father?

And I think Jesus gives an answer in verses eighteen and nineteen, and again in verse twenty-three. In verse eighteen, notice he says, "A good tree can't produce bad fruit, neither can a bad tree produce good fruit." Here in verse nineteen, "Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

And so the reason that the tree was cut down and thrown into the fire, Jesus says, wasn't because it produced bad fruit. I take that to mean that according to Jesus, the thing that really matters isn't the presence of something good or bad, but rather the absence of what God really wants. In other words, it's not all the bad things that you do that necessarily send you into hell.

And that is what this judgment represents. They're cut down and thrown into the fire. That's Jesus's way of saying, "You will spend eternity separated from God in hell." And if you question that, right here he makes it plain as day: "Depart from me, you lawbreakers. I never knew you." They will not be in the presence of God, which you might think of as heaven. They will be separated from God, which you might think of as hell.

But the reason that they go there is because of what is missing. It's because they don't produce the good fruit, the one fruit that God really wants. The reason that they go to

hell is because of all the things that they did, they didn't do the one thing that represented the will of the Father.

And so you can't do enough good things to get you into heaven, and it isn't all the bad things that you do that sends you to hell. Jesus is trying to narrow the focus to this singular fruit that he later identifies as being known by him — knowing Jesus in a covenant kind of way, and being known by Jesus for that same reason.

The fruit is repentance

And so I tried to think through, what is that fruit? And if you do a little word study on this word "fruit," it shows up throughout the book of Matthew. The last time it showed up was in Matthew chapter three, and it was in the teaching and preaching of John the Baptist.

So if you're taking notes: **beware of false religion. What it lacks will keep you out of heaven.** What is it that they lacked? They lacked the spiritual fruit.

John the Baptist in Matthew three is baptizing people, preparing the way of the Lord. And if you remember, the Pharisees and the Sadducees had sent disciples to John, and when John sees them coming, he says, "You brood of vipers, who warned you of the wrath to come?" In other words, you're trying to save yourself. Who do you think you are? And then he challenges them and rebukes them with this language of fruit and judgment. And he says that the ax is already at the root of the tree. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. **Verbatim, the same language that Jesus uses at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.**

And so what is the fruit that John the Baptist says God is after? What is the fruit that Jesus explains in the Sermon on the Mount? **It is fruit that is consistent with repentance** — repentance being this idea that you agree with God about the facts, that you agree with God about the nature of who you are and who he is, about the nature of his just demands and your inability to meet them.

That's why Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" — those who are dependent. That's why Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn," because they get it. They get that they're not good enough. They get that this world is not the way that it's supposed to be. They understand the problem of sin and how it separates us from God. Blessed are those who are meek, in that they surrender to God. They're not trying to earn their righteousness or climb to heaven. They're falling on the mercy of God and saying, "Lord, if you don't forgive me, if you don't save me, I can't save myself."

That's the righteousness that Jesus describes. That's the repentance that John was preaching, **and the Pharisees could not obtain it because their confidence was wrongly placed.**

In fact, if you go back to Matthew three and you listen to what they say, they say something to the effect of, "Well, we have Abraham as our father. Our biology, our genetics — that we're religious Jews, the descendant of Abraham — that's what gives us entrance into the covenant of God."

And Jesus is trying to say, what made Abraham Abraham wasn't his Jewish biology. **What made Abraham a child of the covenant is that he was a child of faith.** He believed, he trusted in God's mercy. He trusted in his covenant faithfulness. He put his confidence in the covenant love of God, and that's why God chose him for his purposes. And I think something similar is going on in the Sermon on the Mount.

Beware of want that meets the wrath of God

And so the last warning that I would give us is about what false religion lacks, and the thing it lacks is the fruit God wants, which is consistent with repentance. **And so beware of want that meets the wrath of God.**

And what I mean by that is at least two things, and with this we're going to wrap it up.

The false teachers were characterized by a hunger and appetite. That's what drove them to consume people with their false religion. I don't know whether it was the need to be praised or the need to be important, the need to be recognized by people. Whatever it was, they were ravenous in that they were hungry, and they were trying to satisfy it through other people.

Other people have that same appetite, but they try to satisfy it in other ways. The prostitutes, the tax collectors that Jesus mentions often, were trying to satisfy that spiritual longing with sex and pleasure, money, greed, the things of this world — and as a result, they are going to meet the wrath of God. First Corinthians chapter six says a whole list of things that if you try to satisfy the longing in your heart with this world, it will separate you from the one for whom you were made. It will separate you from the one source that can truly satisfy.

And so the reality is you can try to wrongly fill that hole with religion or irreligion. You can do that with carnal pleasures and sinful excess, or through self-righteousness and legalism. **They both have their false prophets. They both have their leaders trying to consume.** There's the religious leaders, and then there's the worldly leaders, but they're taking you to the same place.

And what Jesus is trying to warn you against is that longing in your heart being satisfied by anything or anyone other than the one who can truly do so.

He took the thorns

And of course, that one is the point of the Sermon on the Mount. It's the point of the Bible. It's the point of the Old Testament. He is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our righteousness. He is the thing for which we hunger and thirst. He is the covenant mediator who reconciles us to God.

And the thing about Jesus, as you think about the Sermon on the Mount, is that **he actually took the thorns so that we could drink from the vine.** As we think about the Lord's Supper we're about to take, we drink from the juice. It represents the blood of Jesus, which was shed for us. **Jesus wore a crown of thorns upon his head. He took the curse that you and I deserved so that we could be forgiven.** And when God looks at us, he doesn't have to see our sin and brokenness and despair. He can see the life of the Son he loves, because we have been united to him. We become one with Christ. We enter into him, the covenant mediator.

But the way the Bible says you do that is through repentance and faith. It's the fruit of repentance. It's the fruit that says, "God, you're right, I was wrong. God, it's true, everything you said. I cannot save myself. My only hope in life and death is Christ and Christ alone, so nothing in my hands I bring; to the cross alone I cling."

It's this idea that you believe the gospel. That's the will of God. In fact, there's a passage in John's Gospel, John six, that says exactly that: "This is the will of the Father, that you believe on the one he's sent." And **true faith is faith that is characterized by repentance, in that you turn away from what you were doing.** You turn away from self-salvation, whether it was through religion or worldly pleasure. You turn away from those things and you turn to the Lord, because you believe he alone can satisfy.

Only one thing will matter

Before the Lord, on the day of judgment, only one thing is going to matter, and that is whether Jesus knows you and you're known by him in that way.

Even the word "know" — it's covenant language. It's used throughout the Old and New Testaments. Jesus says, "I know my sheep. My sheep know my name." Yahweh in the Old Testament: "I know my covenant people." **It is this knowledge that is intimate. It is different than knowledge about something as a fact.**

You imagine if you were a spouse and you wore your wedding ring, but you never loved the person to whom you were married — then you're only married in name only. There's no affection, there's no passion, there's no desire, there's no intimacy. And for some of you, if you're not careful, that will become your relationship with Jesus. You go to church, you do the dance, you do all the things you're supposed to do, but there isn't any true affection for Jesus Christ.

And if that's your religion — it's going through the motions, it's the ritual, it's the things you're supposed to say, but that in your heart of hearts there isn't any there — then you are in a dangerous place. Because you can have the confidence of everyone else. Maybe even you have your own confidence: "I'm really saved." **But your confidence isn't in Jesus. It's in something else. It's in someone else, whether it's yourself or some religious thing you did.**

The way to know you're going to heaven is because of where you've put your faith. And it's not some prayer you prayed twenty years ago. It's where your faith is right now. Is it right now in the death and resurrection of Jesus? That when I stand before God's throne in heaven and he says, "Why should I let you in?" **my only answer is because of Jesus. It isn't because of my resume, all the things that I did. "I tried my best, I tried real hard" — that will not do.**

Jesus is the inaugurator of this new covenant, and it is that new covenant that Jesus invites every one of us to enter into — that our Father, our Creator, invites us into through faith in Jesus.

Invitation

And so as we take the Lord's Supper, that is a way for you to demonstrate that faith. If you're a Christian and you've been living as though your leader is someone else, then this morning would you repent of that and begin to follow Jesus where he leads.

And if you've never made a decision to trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior — the way that salvation works is through faith. All you need to do today is to trust in him, to call on the name of the Lord in the way that I'm describing. Our only hope in life and death is Jesus Christ and his righteousness. And the bread represents his body broken for us. The juice represents his blood shed for us. And when you partake of that element and you put that into you, through that repentance and faith you are brought into Christ. There is a spiritual union through which the two of you intertwine. He who knew no sin became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

And if all that sounds like too complicated and you just want to talk a little more about it, then put on your connect card, "Too confusing. Please call later." Or, "Hey, I feel like God's

calling me to salvation. I have a few questions." Or maybe you'd say, "I thought I was saved. I'm not really sure."

Do not spend the rest of your life in a place of indecision, and don't put the rest of your life in a place of wrong confidence. Put your confidence in someone who is worthy of that trust and someone who will never disappoint you when the day of judgment comes.

Closing prayer

So Father, we thank you for this time in your Word. We thank you for the Sermon on the Mount — how profound and deep and practical it is, especially as we come to a close. There's not a person in this room who wouldn't say, "I want an abundant life. I want the life that Jesus can give." And yet there may be some here who don't have it. Just like there's probably not many people here this morning, Lord, who would say, "I don't want to follow Jesus." And yet their lives are driven by a deeper want that has them rebelling against you, living in sin.

And so, Holy Spirit, would you give us ears to hear the invitation of our Lord Jesus Christ to enter into the narrow gate and to keep watch for this religious snare — especially for us as church people, people known for our religious conviction. Would you help us to have our confidence in Christ and Christ alone? And whatever it looks like practically on Monday morning and here on out, we pray, Lord, you'd give us wisdom and discernment to know what it is and to put it into practice. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Notes on the recording

[1] *Wes says Enron was "the seventh largest company in the world." It was the seventh-largest company in America (his manuscript has it right). Left as spoken.*

[2] *Fortune's award was "America's Most Innovative Company," not the world's. Left as spoken.*

[3] *He says the stock "skyrocketed up to ninety-six dollars a share" here, then a minute later says it "plummeted from ninety dollars a share down to twenty-six cents." The peak was about ninety dollars; his manuscript uses ninety throughout. Left as spoken.*

[4] *Wes attributes the "don't even touch it" addition to the serpent. In Genesis 3:3 that phrase is Eve's own restatement of God's command; the serpent's line is "Did God really say…?" (Gen 3:1). The point Wes is making — that the word of God gets edited in the exchange — stands either way. Left as spoken.*

Wes's slide cues and one back-up request ("please go back to the last slide") have been removed for readability.