

Watch Out For Wolves!

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Matt. 7:15-20

Many people like to think that you can trust religious leaders. Ministers normally rank high in polls concerning people you can trust. People will often accept whatever a preacher, priest, or rabbi says as the truth.

Yet, Jesus told His disciples to beware of false prophets.

Matt. 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.”*

They may appear like sheep, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. We need to be able to identify them, knowing what to look for.

Are you concerned about false prophets today? You should be!

The great diversity of teaching suggests that many are being misled. We need to be reminded of the danger, and know how to spot any “wolves” that might come our way!

With the words of our Savior in Matt. 7:15-20 fresh on our mind, I wish to use this opportunity to remind us to “Watch Out For Wolves!” Let me first re-emphasize the point that...

There will be false prophets.

As Paul warned on several occasions...

To the Ephesian elders. Acts 20:28-31, *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”*

Telling them to take heed, for even from among themselves would men arise, misleading people.

To the church at Corinth. 2 Cor. 11:13-15, “*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.*”

Referring to false teachers present even then, appearing as ministers of righteousness, even as Satan appears as an angel of light.

To the young preacher Timothy.

- 1 Tim. 4:1-3, “*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.*”
- 2 Tim. 3:1-9, “*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was.*”

Warning of the apostasy that would come, describing the character and tactics of those who would mislead others.

As did other New Testament writers.

Peter, in telling of the rise of false teachers. 2 Pet. 2:1-3, “*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness*

shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”

John, in calling for people to “try the spirits”. 1 John 4:1, *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”*

Jude, in writing of some who had already come. Jude 1:3-4, *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

With so many warnings, this is not a subject to take lightly! But how can we spot such “wolves” when they appear so disarming (like sheep)? Thanks to Jesus and the Word of God...

We can identify false prophets.

By examining the fruit of their life.

We can know them by their “fruit”.

Matt. 7:16-20, *“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.”*

What is truly in their heart will eventually come out, for from the heart proceeds any sin that may be there.

Mark 7:21-23, *“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”*

Thus, false teachers and false prophets are often betrayed...

- By their greediness (as manifested by their lavish lifestyles).
- By their immorality (as manifested by adulterous relationships).
- By their lust for power (as manifested by religious empires).

Given time, the true character of many false prophets will be exposed by the fruit of their life!

By examining the fruit of their teaching.

Taking notice of their methods.

Working secretly. 2 Pet. 2:1, *“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”*

Rather than being open to one and all. 2 Cor. 8:20-21, *“Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”*

Appealing to covetousness. 2 Pet. 2:3, *“And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”*

They draw people with an appeal to what people often covet (such as health and wealth), rather than preparing people for what Christians can expect.

- Acts 14:23, *“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”*
- 2 Tim. 3:12, *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”*

Using deceptive words.

- 2 Tim. 3:13, *“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.”*
- 2 Pet. 2:3, *“And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”*

Twisting the scriptures to support their message (just as Satan did in trying to tempt Jesus), rather than handling the word of God rightly.

2 Tim. 2:14-16, *“Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.”*

Taking notice of their doctrine.

How they twist and pervert the scriptures. Gal. 1:8-9, *“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”*

Their gospel may start out right, but becomes twisted along the way. Their teaching often expressed in the terms of man, not scripture.

How they teach that which is clearly contrary to the scriptures. Deut. 13:1-4, *“If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.”*

Even if they appear able to perform signs and wonders! The final test is how their teaching compares to the word of God and that of His apostles.

- 1 John 4:1, *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”*
- 1 John 4:6, *“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”*

Conclusion.

It is not necessary to judge the hearts of those who claim to speak for God. We need only to be “fruit-inspectors”. The fruit of their life and teaching will become apparent soon enough. This is how we can “Watch Out For Wolves!”

Of course, this presumes that our knowledge of God’s word is sufficient...

- To know what to look for in the life of a false prophet.
- To know what to listen for in the teaching of a false prophet.
- Otherwise, we will be no different than Israel, of whom God said:

Hos. 4:6, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”*

Are you equipped to identify a wolf in sheep’s clothing if you saw one?

