

Sunday, December 6, 2020 am

**Teachings of Jesus (29)**  
**Sermon on the Mount (28)**  
**Wolves in Sheep's Clothing**  
**Matthew 7:15-20**

As we continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount, we are in the midst of Jesus concluding this lesson. He is talking choices. Last week we talked about the two paths – the broad way that leads to destruction and the difficult way that leads to eternal life in heaven. Today we continue His discourse on choices by noting His warning about false teachers.

**I. Wolves in sheep's clothing**

a. The Bible continually warns us about false teachers

- i. 2 Peter 2:1-3 – a strong warning against false teachers and prophets
- ii. 1 Timothy 4:1-3 – in latter times, some will depart from the faith, following after “deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons”
- iii. Titus 1:10-11 – one of the tasks of elders – to spot the false teacher.
- iv. Acts 20:28-30 – where Paul warns the Ephesian elders of wolves coming from their midst.
- v. 1 John 4:1 speaks of many false prophets having gone out into the world...
- vi. Jude 3-4 warns of men that had crept in unnoticed and turned the grace of God into lewdness (permitting immoral conduct).
- vii. NOTE: Most NT writer warned of false teachers in one way or another. It is certainly found in the gospels. And above lists the known authors of the NT.

b. **Why the warning?**

- i. Because people have a tendency to trust religious leaders. They rely on them to guide them spiritually to where they need to be. And they OUGHT to be able to be trusted. This is why I believe the warning of James 3:1 is in scripture – let not many be teachers.
- ii. But sadly, not all spiritual leaders are godly men worthy of your trust.  
We hear today of preachers and other leaders engaging in shameful conduct, even taking advantage of those over whom they lead. And still others, have doctrinal agendas that will lead people on the road to destruction.  
Some are self-serving living immoral lives, are greedy or lusting for power over others. That is why I believe Jesus placed this warning here.
- iii. As with so much of the sermon on the mount, I believe Jesus had the corrupt Jewish leaders in mind that He had been confronting all along. We find many of them (not all) were guilty of many of the things we have just mentioned.
- iv. They sound convincing and harmless – notice they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Just as a sheep looks harmless, so does this one who is disguised like a sheep. And some can be very convincing. They use smooth words and are friendly to win you over to them. But when they get you...  
2 Corinthians 11:13-15 – they transform themselves into angels of light.

c. **They will DEVOUR you!** They will consume you – doing all they can to get you to their side. Consider again Matthew 23:13, 15 – notice how Jesus said they travel land and sea to win one proselyte and then make them twice as much a son of hell as themselves. The point being they win you over to THEM instead of the Lord. They want you just as much as Satan does, and will often do whatever they need to do to make that happen.

## II. How do you spot the wolf?

- a. You will know them by their fruit –  
Fruit is the product or result – hence the word “produce” – think about that word. The point is, in time the “fruit” of anyone reveals itself, IF you are genuinely aware of it.
- b. Jesus noted, that like the two ways, there are two fruits and they are incompatible – “like apples and oranges”. Jesus makes the point that either a tree bears one or the other – you cannot bear both good and bad fruit. (NOTE: Attempts to bear “good” fruit on a “bad” tree will make the fruit bad. Example: If you put a rotten apple in a fruit basket with other good apples, it will not take long for the bad apple to spoil the rest – therefore it MUST be removed.
- c. **How do we spot the false teacher?** We have to know the truth! 1 John 4:1, John 8:32, the truth will make you free. There is a reason elders cannot be “a novice” (1 Timothy 3:5-6) and of proven character. But, every one of us in time needs to mature in faith and the word so that we will not be “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14-15)
- d. 1 John 4:1 – test the spirits whether they are of God.
- e. The warning of Moses – two passages – Deuteronomy 18:22 & 13:1-4 – note two different ways to tell they are false prophets – 1 – their actions betray them (they fail to do God’s work) and 2 – they succeed but their doctrine is so obviously false, you KNOW they are false teachers.
- f. What is fruit? John 15:2
  - i. The fruit of the false teacher –
    - Consider the scribes and Pharisees Jesus was addressing – hypocrisy, manipulation of the Law of God, etc.
    - 2 Timothy 3:1-7 describes characteristics that if present are a warning – this is the list of selfishness. This is also the covetousness of 2 Peter 2:3
    - 2 Peter 2:1 speaks about how they work secretly
    - 2 Peter 2:3 – they can sound convincing because they are persuasive.
    - It is often manifest in lives that are either covetous and permissive OR overly controlling – going BEYOND God’s boundaries.
    - OFTEN, false teachers go behind the back of the strong and leaders to advance their doctrine. They may ask to study some doctrine privately to “see what you think”. They will try to win you over to their side with complements, etc. You will find them questioning the leaders and their decisions and making underhanded comments.  
When they have amassed their following, they will make their move. And more often than not, they destroy or greatly damage a congregation. There have been movements among churches of Christ that have done this very thing. It is ungodly.
  - ii. The fruit of the truth –
    - Fruit of the Spirit – Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 5:9
    - Fruit worthy of repentance - Matthew 3:8
    - Romans 6:21-22 – holiness
    - Hebrews 13:15 – the fruit of our lips – praise to God
    - The fruit of righteousness – James 3:18, 2 Corinthians 9:10, Ephesians 5:9, Philippians 1:11, Hebrews 12:11. NOTE our sermon – “unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness...” (Matthew 5:20)
- g. The result of bearing bad fruit – vs. 19 – it is cut down and thrown into the fire. Jesus emphasized this in John 15:1-8 where we are called upon to bear good fruit. BTW, a failure to bear fruit is classified as a bad tree.
- h. A final observation – there is a difference between a false teacher and someone genuinely seeking the truth. There is a difference between the Jewish leaders and men like Paul and Apollos who were more desirous of being right than their own selfish desires. There is a difference between the one

who has an agenda and a babe in Christ that is asking questions and clarification. Again, this will be manifest in the fruit one is bearing – it will come out when they are challenged or taught.

In conclusion, in Matthew 3:10 as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, he noted that every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. That is also what Jesus taught in our text in vs. 19. Friends, are you alert to the truth? Can you spot the good and bad fruit? And equally important, WHAT TYPE of fruit are you producing? Think about it!