

COUNTERFEITS

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Matthew 7:15-20

Beware of False Prophets

Matthew 7:15 (KJV) 15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

- Jesus is near the end of His Sermon on the Mount teaching and He's just completed teaching that *narrow* is the way that leads to eternal life and *broad* is the way that leads to *destruction*
- Now Jesus is warning believers to *beware* of false prophets
- A false prophet is someone who is *deliberately, falsely claiming* to have the gift of prophecy, or divine inspiration or, ability to speak for God and is *deliberately manipulating* the Word of God
- Jesus said false prophets were like *wolves in sheep's clothing*
- In those times, you could identify person's profession by the clothing they wore
- But people often wore outfits they had no right to wear so they could deceive people
- In Jesus' time, there were people who were wearing the prophet's cloak, but were not living "the prophet's life"
- A wolf in sheep's clothing is speaks of someone who *outwardly* appears harmless, kind, and has good intentions, but *inwardly* is full of hate, evil, and deceit
- A false prophet twists and manipulates the Word of God to fit their agenda
- *Outwardly* they appear harmless like sheep, but *inwardly* their objective is to destroy you like a hungry wolf
- False prophets are like hungry wolves as they are only concerned about themselves and personal gain
- Jesus is saying false teachers exist amongst believers, which is why He says we are to be watchful because it's easy to fall for "the fake ministry" of false teachers ***2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NLT) 3 For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will reject the truth and chase after myths.***
- False prophets and teachers are skilled at deception ***2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (NLT) 13 These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 But I am not surprised! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve.***
- Although false prophets are in our midst and "disguised" as sheep, Jesus still says beware and be alert ***1 Corinthians 16:13 (NLT) 13 Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.***

How Can We Tell If a Prophet is False?

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

- Is it possible to tell if a prophet is false?
- Yes, we will know if a prophet is true or false *by their fruit*, by the *conduct* of their lives
- Fruit is:
 - The fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control
 - Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - Pointing people to Jesus

COUNTERFEITS

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Matthew 7:15-20

- Directing people to the forgiveness and freedom that *only* Jesus can give
- Preaching Jesus is our Savior and salvation comes through Him
- Preaching and teaching the authority of the Word of God
- Is how the prophet is living his/her life
- The prophet will be known by *what fruit* he/she is producing in their own lives and what they are producing in the lives of others
- Thorns and thistles are “false food”, it’s the food of the world
- We are called to try (test) the prophets **1 John 4:1 (NLT) 1 Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.**
- We are to prove (examine) all things **1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NLT) “...but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.”**
- We must look at more than “external success”, and look for the fruit to manifest and come to light **1 Corinthians 4:5 (NLT) “...For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives.”**

Good Trees and Bad Trees

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, either can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

- A tree is not judged by a piece of bad fruit “here and there”, but by the good fruit it bears
 - Every tree will produce some bad fruit from time to time, but that doesn’t mean the tree should be destroyed
 - We must not be so quick to judge a prophet based on a “single act” here and there, but look at the whole behavior of their lives
 - Good prophets will produce consistently good character, behavior and morals as they strive to live out the truths of Scripture in their lives
 - Evil prophets will *consistently and deliberately* live in rebellion to the word, exhibit poor behaviors and live immoral lives
 - Godly prophets will over time produce good fruit
 - False prophets over time will produce bad fruit
 - Regardless of what a false prophet does, their fruit will be bad, because they can’t bear good fruit
 - Good fruit can’t be expected from a corrupt tree
 - Bad fruit can’t be expected from a good tree
 - Jesus says when the tree is bad, it’s marked as bad, it’s cut down, and cast into the fire
 - The fate of false prophets and teachers is they will be identified as false, they will be judged by God as false, and face eternal separation from God

How Can I Protect Myself from Wolves in Sheep's Clothing?

Be Watchful

- The enemy preys on the careless, unconcerned, weary believers

COUNTERFEITS

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Matthew 7:15-20

- This is not the time to be careless, but to be alert **1 Peter 5:8 (NLT) 8 Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.**

Know What's Real

- Jesus said will false prophets recognize them by their fruits
- What Jesus is saying if we focus on what's real, any fruit that is false will stick out and be easily recognized
- Ask yourself:
 - Does their life line up with the Bible?
 - Are they humble or are they in ministry for personal gain?
 - Do they have a good reputation?
 - Do they have a church and pastor they are accountable to?

Know the Word

- We must know the Word of God for ourselves, because the devil can disguise himself as an angel of light
- As believers we are responsible to feed ourselves from the Word each day, we are to study the Word, meditate on the Word, receive teaching from the Word, and guard the Word in our heart **Psalms 119:11 (KJV) 11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.**
- Jesus says knowing the truth will set us free **John 8:32 (KJV) 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**
- Know the word for yourself so you'll know when it's being watered down, manipulated or twisted **2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV) Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**

Rely on Your Spiritual Discernment

- God has given us His Spirit and the Holy Spirit gives us discernment, the wisdom, the ability to determine truth from error **John 16:13 (KJV) "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth..."**
- Your discernment is a *spiritual alert* that something being said or done is not right
 - That's when you pray and ask God what is it that I need to see or know
 - God will never leave you in the dark

Surround Yourself with Strong Believers

- Every believer needs other mature believers in their lives
- We need to fellowship with believers that can speak into our lives, encourage, and even correct us when necessary **Proverbs 11:14 (KJV) 14 Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.**