

WATCH OUT FOR WOLVES! (MATTHEW 7:15-20)

INTRO.:

1. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had been presenting some tremendous challenges to those who want to be His disciples.
 - a. He has called for us to have a righteousness that exceeds that of the outward righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.
 - b. And he has given us several examples of how that righteousness is played out in our daily lives.
 - c. As he comes to the end of this great lesson He concludes by offering us several challenges or choices.
2. Last week we looked at the first series of choices when we noticed he said we must choose which way we are going to go in life.
 - a. We must decide whether we will follow the wide, broad way that leads to destruction, or the narrow way that leads to life?
 - b. We must decide whether we will go along with the majority on the path of ease and self-indulgence, or are we going to make the effort to follow the pathway of self-denial?
3. This AM we will look at the second set of choices Jesus gave us as He talks about who we are going to follow, or who we are going to let be our guide religiously.
4. Many people like to think that if you can trust anyone, you can surely trust what religious leaders say.
 - a. A few years back when polls were taken religious leaders normally ranked high on the list as people you could trust.
 - b. People will often accept whatever a preacher, priest, or rabbi says as the truth, just because of their position.
 - c. Now I realize that in recent years some things have changed, but overall religious leaders are still considered trustworthy.
5. In Matt. 7:15-20 Jesus warns His disciples to beware of false prophets, or be careful about what you hear: (Read).
 - a. In this passage Jesus said that false prophets appear like sheep, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.
 - 1) They are “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”
 - 2) They are false teachers disguising themselves as true workers of God.
 - 3) And following their teachings will cause you to lose your soul.
 - b. Since this is the case, we need to be able to identify them, and know what to look for.
6. Let me ask you seriously, are you concerned about false prophets, or false teachers today? If you are not, you should be!
 - a. As we look at the great diversity of doctrine in Christianity today it suggests that many are being misled.
 - b. There are many voices today all claiming to be speaking the truth, but each presenting something different, or even contradictory.
 - 1) Who is right?
 - 2) Who should we follow?
 - 3) How do we know?
 - c. The fact is that we need to realize the tremendous danger that exists, and know how to spot any “wolves” that might come our way!
 - d. In our day of religious commercialism where people shop for a church like they shop for a car, Jesus gives this warning: “Let the buyer beware!”
7. Jesus warned that false prophets will come and they will call people away from the narrow way he just spoke of in Matt. 7:13-14.
 - a. They will call people to a way of ease and comfort, a way of self-fulfillment, a way of “if-it-feels-good-do-it,” even in religion.
 - b. And they will say that this is the real way to heaven.
 - 1) While some may conscientiously be trying to lead people astray.
 - 2) Far more may be sincere, but still lost (Matt. 7:21-23).

8. Sadly, many Christians have chosen to follow these false prophets because they do not know how to discern truth from error.
 - a. They do not know how to tell the difference between a true shepherd and a wolf masquerading as a shepherd.
 - b. That is why that as Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount He gives us this stern warning.
9. This AM as we continue to look at the Sermon on the Mount and what Jesus said about the righteousness necessary to be a part of the kingdom of heaven, let us notice what He said about those who would offer us a false righteousness.

LESSON:

- I. First, notice that the Bible warns time and again that there will be false prophets.
 - A. Jesus said: Matt. 24:24: *“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.”*
 - B. On several occasions Paul warned against false teachers:
 1. To the Ephesian elders he said: Acts 20:28-31: (Read).
 - a. Paul warned them to take heed.
 - b. He warned that even from among their own number men would arise, misleading the flock astray.
 - c. He knew that some of the very elders he was speaking to would soon rise up and tear the church apart as ravenous wolves.
 2. To the church at Corinth he said: 2 Cor. 11:13-15: (Read).
 - a. Paul was referring to false teachers present in the church.
 - b. They look innocent enough, but they have a way of destroying the flock.
 - c. They appeared as ministers of righteousness, even as Satan appears as an angel of light.
 - d. But because of their dangerous, deceptive nature we need to expose them, and warn others, not allowing them to devour the flock.
 3. To Timothy - 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 4:3-4: (Read).
 - a. Paul constantly warned him of the apostasy that would come.
 - b. And he described the character and tactics of those who would mislead others.
 - C. The warnings of other NT writers:
 1. Peter, in telling of the rise of false teachers: 2 Pet. 2:1-3: (Read).
 2. John, in calling for people to *“test the spirits:”* 1 John 4:1: *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*
 3. Jude, in writing his short epistle warned that some false teachers had already crept into the church: Jude 3-4: (Read).
 - D. With so many warnings, this is not a subject to take lightly!
 1. But how can we spot such *“wolves”* when they appear so like sheep?
 2. Thanks to Jesus and the Word of God we can identify them.
- II. How do we identify false prophets?
 - A. First, notice that Jesus said, do not go by looks, because looks can be deceiving.
 1. In the OT Samuel was deceived by the outward appearance of Jesse’s sons and would have chosen the wrong son if he had gone by appearances only (1 Sam. 16:7).

2. Jesus said if you go by looks then you will miss the false teachers because, “*They will come to you in sheep’s clothing.*”
 - a. They will appear as harmless.
 - b. They will come in the most mild and inoffensive manner possible.
 - c. They will come looking very religious and acting very Godly (Matt. 7:21-23).
 - d. They will come saying all the right words.
 - e. They will come with a lot of zeal.
 - f. They will come with an appearance of love, kindness, and good manners, saying that they want to help you.
 - g. They will wear a cross around their neck and carry a Bible under their arm.
 - h. And many will come to you in total sincerity, believing that they are right.
3. But Jesus warns that this is all just a covering.
 - a. Outwardly they look good, but underneath there is a raging wolf.
 - b. It is all just a covering of wool.
4. ILLUST.: Please identify the following person who did all these things in the name of Jesus:
 - a. He knew how to inspire hope.
 - b. He was committed to people in need.
 - c. He counseled prisoners and juvenile delinquents.
 - d. He started a job placement center.
 - e. He opened rest homes and homes for the retarded.
 - f. He had a health clinic.
 - g. He organized a vocational training center.
 - h. He provided free legal aid.
 - i. He founded a community center.
 - j. He preached about God.
 - k. He even claimed to cast out demons, do miracles and heal.
 - l. <<Jim Jones>>
5. Simply, outward appearances are deceiving, so how do we identify false prophets?

B. Jesus said, “*By their fruits you shall know them.*”

1. Jesus says we can know false teachers if we will just do some fruit inspecting (Matt. 7:16-20).
2. ILLUST.: Nearly everyone knows the story of “Little Red Riding Hood.”
 - a. In the story the wolf was dressed up to look just like Grandma, but Little Red Riding Hood was able to quickly tell the difference.
 - b. “Why Grandma, what big ears, eyes, teeth, etc. you have.”
 - c. She did some fruit inspecting and found out it was just a wolf in Grandma’s clothing.
 - d. NOTE: If a fairy tale character can figure out a false person, then why cannot Christians learn to recognize a false teacher/prophet?
3. The fact is that we can know a false teacher by examining their life:
 - a. What is truly in their heart will eventually come out, for from the heart proceeds any sin that may be there (Mk. 7:21-23).
 - b. Thus false teachers and false prophets are often betrayed...
 - 1) By their greediness (as manifested by their lavish lifestyles).
 - 2) By their immorality (as manifested by adulterous relationships).
 - 3) By their lust for power (as manifested by the religious empires they build).
 - c. Given time, the true character of many false prophets will be exposed by the fruit of their life!
4. But we can also know a false teacher by examining their teachings/doctrine:
 - a. Examine their methods, or how they work:
 - 1) Many working secretly: 2 Pet. 2:1: (Read)
 - a) Their ministries (especially finances) will be shrouded in secrecy.
 - b) Rather than being open to one and all for careful examination, they will try to hide their inner workings (2 Cor. 8:20-21).

- 2) They appeal to covetousness, or the baser side of life - 2 Pet. 2:2-3: (Read).
 - a) They draw people with an appeal to what people often covet or want (such as health and wealth).
 - i They will offer a religion with no cross-bearing, or little self-denial.
 - ii They will talk about how religion can be “fun,” a word never used in the Bible in connection with religion.
 - iii They will offer you an exciting, dynamic “worship” experience that is filled with entertainment and an appeal to the baser side of man, rather than to his spiritual side.
 - b) Rather than preparing people for what Christians can expect (persecution, ridicule, hardships) they offer a false hope (Acts 14:23; 2 Tim. 3:12).
- 3) They will use deceptive words (2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:3).
 - a) They will twist the scriptures to support their message (just as Satan did in trying to tempt Jesus).
 - b) Rather than rightly handling the word of God (2 Tim. 2:14-16), they will take passages out of context to try to prove something God never intended.
 - i For example, many will tell you that all you have to do to be saved is, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus,*” because that is what Paul told the Philippian jailor to do (Acts 16:31).
 - ii But they will fail to mention the rest of the text and how they were immediately baptized (vs. 33).
 - c) They will sound like they have a very good grasp on the scripture, but if you take them back and pin them down to the context in which the passage was given, they will fall apart, or become extremely defensive.
 - d) And in many cases, they will refuse to study with you again.
 - e) Or sometimes, they will say things in such a way that you go away scratching your head, wondering what they really said.
 - i They are so vague that you wonder what they really are saying.
 - ii Their words are so flowery that the message is hidden.
 - f) They use religious sounding terms but never get specific about heaven or hell.
 - g) They will soften the issues regarding faith in Christ and obedience to Him.
- b. Examine their doctrine, or exactly what it is that they really are teaching and believing:
 - 1) Is it the pure gospel, or a twisted, perverted, watered-down version (Gal. 1:8-9)?
 - a) Their message may start out right, but somewhere along the way it gets twisted.
 - b) Their teachings are often expressed in human terms and feelings, rather than what does God’s word say on the matter.
 - c) ILLUST.:
 - i Jesus said there is only “one way, while false teachers will say there are many ways that all end up at the same place.
 - ii Jesus says that the way of a disciple is self-denial and the way of the cross, while false teachers will say that as long as you believe in Jesus and make your personal peace with God you can live however you want and still get to heaven.
 - 2) Is what they teach clearly contrary to the other scriptures?
 - a) Even if they appear very religious and are able to perform signs and wonders, God warns: Deut. 13:1-4: (Read).
 - i No matter how respected he may be.
 - ii No matter how many miracles he may claim.
 - iii No matter how much good he seems to do.
 - iv We have a responsibility to search the Scripture and test the message of every man who claims to speak on behalf of God.
 - b) The final test is how does their teaching compare to the word of God: 1 John 4:1, 6: (Read).

III. Finally, what should be done to false teachers?

- A. In Matt. 7:19 Jesus said that they need to be cut down and thrown into the fire – Why?
1. Because they are dangerous and bearing bad fruit.
 2. Because they are wolves who will not spare the flock until they have destroyed as many as possible.
- B. Notice what some other NT writers said:
1. Rom. 16:17-18: “*Mark them... Turn away from them.*” (Read).
 2. Eph. 5:11: “*And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them.*”
 3. 2 John 9-11: (Read).
- C. One other point to notice is what often happens when false teachers are exposed.
1. ASK: What happens when you trap a real wolf?
 - a. Become vicious.
 - b. Will use every means possible to defend itself.
 - c. Will claw, bit, charge their enemy, etc.
 2. NOTE: This is what will also often occur when false teachers (wolves in sheep’s clothing) are exposed.
 - a. Will become very defensive and use every means possible to defend themselves.
 - b. And they will often lash out at the very ones who have exposed them and try to destroy them.

CONC.:

1. In our text Jesus called for us to “*Watch out for the wolves*” – that is, be very careful who you choose to listen to and follow.
2. To do this will require a good knowledge of God’s word.
 - a. Like Jesus, if we are going to battle Satan on his turf and come out victorious, we must:
 - 1) Know what to look for in the life of a false prophet.
 - 2) And know what to listen for in the teaching of a false prophet.
 - b. Otherwise we will be no different than Israel, of whom God said: “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...*” - Hosea 4:6.
 - c. Sadly, the wolves destroyed Israel because they were ill equip to know the truth from error.
3. Are you equipped to identify a wolf in sheep's clothing if you saw one?