

## False Prophets.

Text: Matt 7:15-23

1) Jesus Describes False Prophets

Suggested Hymns:

2) Jesus Condemns False Prophets

519, 197, 180, 399, 260

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 7:15-23, <sup>15</sup> *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”* <sup>16</sup> *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?”* <sup>17</sup> *“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.”* <sup>18</sup> *“A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.”* <sup>19</sup> *“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”* <sup>20</sup> *“Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”*

<sup>21</sup> *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”* <sup>22</sup> *“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’”* <sup>23</sup> *“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today’s Gospel talks about false prophets. In plain and simple words the Lord Jesus declares in the very first verse, “Beware of false prophets!” and in the remaining verses He goes into the subject more fully.

A sermon on a subject of this kind is always timely and necessary although it may not be popular with some people. Nevertheless we should bear in mind that every word of the text was spoken by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is true God with the Father and therefore cannot tell a falsehood. He is at the same time the great Prophet who was promised by God and sent by Him.

Concerning Jesus, the Father Himself, on the Mount of Transfiguration spoke these significant words, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”* *“Hear Him”* means listen to what He says. We should therefore be both ready and eager to hear what Jesus has to say to us on the subject of False Prophets. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. Jesus Describes False Prophets

Firstly, Jesus describes their nature. He calls them false prophets, and thereby points us to their real nature or make-up. They are prophets, that is, religious teachers or instructors who apparently are qualified to teach religion and answer religious questions, particularly the question: *How can a person enter the Kingdom of God and become truly blessed for time and eternity?*

But the Lord stamps these prophets at once as false. He is telling us that they have no divine right to teach and that their teachings are false either in whole or in part. They do not proclaim the truth of God as He has revealed it in His holy Word.

Instead of God’s Word, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men. As a result, their hearers are misinformed; they hear false views and opinions on matters that are of such vital importance to their earthly and eternal welfare and happiness.

What God says by the mouth of Jeremiah is true of all of them, as we read in Jeremiah 23:16, *Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, Not from the mouth of the LORD.* That is the nature of false prophets as described by the Lord in His lesson before us.

Secondly, the Lord describes the false prophets approach when He says of them in the text, *who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.* False prophets are active. They are energetic in carrying on their work. And they don’t wait for an invitation. They come of their own accord.

Whom do they approach? **“You,”** says Christ in speaking to His followers. The very ones whom He has taught the Word of Truth are the focus of false prophets in their activity. And it is rather difficult to detect them at first sight,

because they come *“in sheep’s clothing.”* They make a good impression. Their outward behaviour and their presentation of religious topics make their hearers feel that they are sincere, earnest, and even truthful.

They do not openly confess that they teach contrary to the Word of God. Instead, they make it appear as though they preach the Bible by even quoting from it. *“But,”* says Jesus in describing them, *“inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”* What a pack of hungry wolves do to a flock of sheep, that false prophets do to the sheep of Christ’s fold. Yes, false prophets are not sheep, but wolves.

As such they devour the souls of people, because they consciously or unconsciously withhold the truth of God’s Word by which alone sinners can be saved and sanctified. They preach neither the Law of God in its full severity nor the Gospel of salvation in its full sweetness. The result is that their hearers do not learn from their teaching that they are lost and condemned sinners who deserve the wrath and punishment of God and therefore cannot save themselves.

Neither do they learn the precious truth that God has done everything for them, that He sent His only-begotten Son to be the Propitiation for the world’s sin, that Christ died for every sinner and earned for him forgiveness, and that every sinner who trusts in Christ has forgiveness, is justified before God and made an heir of life eternal.

These precious truths are withheld from their hearers by false prophets. If such hearers remain under the influence of false teachers, they die in unbelief and are lost eternally. That is what the Lord means when He describes false prophets as *“ravenous wolves.”*

Thirdly, in describing false prophets, Jesus tells us to apply the fruit test. In describing prophets the Lord does not fail to give His followers some idea as to how they can determine whether a religious teacher is false or true. Make the fruit test, is His descriptive way of advising them.

We read, *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?”*<sup>17</sup> *“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ...”*<sup>20</sup> *“Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”*

The quality of a tree can be tested by the fruits it produces. If the fruit is good, a tree is regarded as good, but if the fruit is evil, the tree is likewise regarded as evil. So it is also with false prophets. Their “fruits” stamp them as false. What is meant by the “fruits” of prophets? They are the teachings of the false prophets.

The words of the Prophet Isaiah apply here. We read in Isaiah 8:20, <sup>20</sup> *If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* It is possible to recognise a false prophet by making an examination of his teachings. If he teaches contrary to the sacred Scriptures, he must at once be stamped as false.

The Bereans made such a test of the teachings of Paul and Silas. We read of them in Acts 17:11, They “*searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*” And the Lord tells His followers that they should do this very thing, make the “fruit test,” so to speak. *By their fruits you will know them* are His exact words, which are found twice in our text.<sup>1</sup> He wants to be helpful to His followers by describing false prophets in this manner.

So, what is the lesson for us. This description concerning false prophets as given by the Lord has been recorded for our benefit. False prophets are found in the world also in this so-called enlightened 21st century. We find them in various fields of human affairs, such as politics, international relations, education, finances, and the like.

Is there any reason to doubt or deny the existence, let alone the possibility, of false prophets in religious matters in this our day? There are false prophets all around us. They use whatever means they can, TV, radio, Internet and the papers. At times they address themselves to us personally.

However, we must not be surprised at this. The Lord Himself foretold such things in speaking of the last days of the world. He told His disciples in Matthew 24:11, <sup>11</sup> *“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.”* Similarly, we find that the Lord’s Apostles repeatedly called the attention of hearers and readers to the presence of false prophets and made special reference to the fact that in the last times there would be an abundance of them.

Therefore, the Lord’s lesson concerning false prophets is very timely also for us. He says to us today, <sup>15</sup> *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in*

*sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.* <sup>16</sup> ***“You will know them by their fruits.*** In describing false prophets like this Jesus wants us to realise that there really are false prophets. He wants us to be on the look-out for them and on our guard against them.

We are to recognise them by their fruits, that is, their teachings, as false prophets, lest they through their corrupt teachings lead us into error and finally into everlasting perdition by robbing us of our faith in Jesus Christ alone who on the Cross of Calvary suffered and died for our sins.

In addition to the words of our Lord we will do well to take to heart what the Apostle Paul writes to the Romans, in Romans 16:17, <sup>17</sup> ***Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.***

And John writes in his First Epistle, 1 John 4:1, <sup>1</sup> ***Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*** Let us therefore be thankful for the manner in which the Lord describes false prophets to us in the text.

## **2. Jesus Condemns False Prophets**

The Lord does more than describe false prophets in the text before us. He at the same time condemns them.

Firstly, He condemns them because they are false. There is a strong condemnation already in the very name which the Lord ascribes to them, namely, false prophets. In other words, these prophets are the very opposite of the true, genuine, upright and kind prophets.

There isn't anything of a complimentary nature in this expression **“false prophets.”** It rather carries with it a stigma which immediately condemns their kind and serves to tell people not to have anything to do with them.

Elsewhere in the Bible we find similar condemnations. By the mouth of the Prophet Jeremiah God declares in Jeremiah 23:31, <sup>31</sup> ***“Behold, I am against the prophets,” says the LORD, “who use their tongues and say, ‘He says.’*** This is only one of many such statements found in the 23d chapter of the book of the Prophet Jeremiah. It will pay us to read the entire chapter at our convenience in our homes.

Compare for a moment a true prophet or teacher of religion. Everything he teaches can be and is substantiated with a fervent and confident *“Thus says the Lord,”* or in the word of Micaiah,<sup>2</sup> *“As the LORD lives, whatever the LORD says to me, that I will speak.”* Such is not the case with the false prophets of whom Christ speaks in the text. They are false, and He condemns them as such.

Secondly, at the same time the Lord condemns false prophets as dangerous. He says, *“Beware of false prophets!”* *“Beware!”* is a word of warning against danger. It is used here by none other than the Son of God, who knows all things, who cannot misjudge matters, and who is by no means an alarmist.

He says that false prophets are dangerous, a menace to one’s eternal welfare. By their false and corrupt teachings they keep their hearers from coming to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. If ignorance of His saving love for them and all sinners persists, they will perish eternally.

False prophets do this very thing with their hearers. They withhold the blessed truth that sinners are redeemed by Christ and have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him. No wonder, then, that the Lord condemns false prophets as dangerous by referring to them as *“ravenous wolves”* and issuing the warning *“Beware!”*

Finally, on Judgment Day His verdict will be made final. Jesus speaks also of this in His lesson concerning false prophets as recorded in the text. We read, *“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’”*<sup>23</sup> *“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”*

False prophets, who like all other human beings must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, will make a last-ditch appeal to defend their profession and activities. But their appeal will not be accepted. The Lord will reject them and their so-called works in His name. They will go into eternal ruin, the lot of all who failed to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Thus the Lord condemns false prophets and announces the verdict which awaits them on Judgment Day.

There is much that we can learn from this lesson of the Lord concerning false prophets. May we above all take to heart His admonition, *“Beware of false*

*prophets,*” and then also remember for our own profession of faith these words of the Lord in the text, <sup>21</sup> *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Verse 16 and 20

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 22:14