

TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORD -

How to Recognize False Teachers

Matthew 7:15-20

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We are coming back to the Sermon on the Mount. I am going to be here this week, next week and then on the 29th and I think we may finish the Sermon on the Mount in that time.

We are coming to a critical passage as Jesus has turned the corner in His message and now He shows forth the reality and the implications of what He is saying. And He comes to His disciples at this point in the sermon and He gives them a very necessary and a very clear warning that would help them preserve their spiritual lives and to stay on the narrow way.

Last time we were in the Sermon on the Mount, we looked at chapter 7, verse 14 and I would invite you to turn there. Matthew 7:14 where Jesus said:

The gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

We said the way to heaven is narrow. It is narrow because salvation is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you do not know Christ, you are not going to heaven, you are going to hell—it is that clear and that simple and that black and white and that stark in the Bible. Salvation is found only through faith alone, in Christ alone—it is a narrow way.

We also said that salvation requires a deep repentance. Coming to Christ is a profound matter. It is not a superficial walk down the aisle, it is not a superficial raising of a hand while the preacher said, “Everybody has got their eyes closed, so it is okay to slip your hand up.” That is just such total nonsense; it has nothing to do with biblical salvation at all.

As we talked about last time I was up here, salvation requires a deep repentance where you turn away from the world, you turn away from sin and you turn away from any assertion of your own self-righteousness. And you profoundly acknowledge in total abject humility before the God of the universe, “I am a sinner who is guilty before you. I turn from that and I embrace Christ as my Lord and Savior, as my only hope of salvation, that His death on the cross in my place was the only place where my sins could be paid for, and that His righteousness, given to me as a gift is the only thing that could fit me for

heaven.” This is serious, profound, deep stuff, this is not something to treat lightly; it is not something that God treats lightly—it is a narrow way. And when we understand salvation in those terms, in those biblical terms, we realize that the mass of people who say something about knowing Jesus is actually much broader than those who would actually know Him and those who would actually bring forth the fruit of repentance in their lives. And so we want to take these things very seriously just like Jesus does.

And we mentioned that it is a narrow way because salvation often leads to affliction for those who know Christ—and so it is a narrow way and it is a hard way because it means the breaking of your pride forever, it means a total humiliation before God and a humble coming to Him, it means a total reversal of life priorities. People don’t interact with God at that level; too often God just means someone to help them with their daily problems—it is a narrow way. And because it is a narrow way, beloved, here is the spiritual threat to you, because it is a narrow way, men want to have someone make it easier for them. Bible talks about how men will gather around teachers who will tickle their ears and tell them what they want to hear, that it’s not so narrow, that it’s not so difficult, that it doesn’t require such a profound heart sacrifice. And there are more than enough men who want to step in to that role of teacher and tell you that it’s not so bad, it’s not so narrow, it’s not so difficult and tell you that everything is okay. Bible has a term for such men like that—false prophets, liars, even antichrists.

Now when Jesus, as He is building to this crescendo, building to this climax to call people in to His kingdom and He has just said that the way is narrow, Jesus is very mindful of these threats from false prophets that are there to try to lead the disciples away, to turn people away from the narrow gate and guide them in to the broad gate that would lead to eternal destruction. And because Jesus is mindful of that threat in His matchless omniscient wisdom and in His great grace and care for His disciples, He gives us very helpful instruction as we would seek to enter through the narrow gate and walk the narrow path that leads to eternal life. Look at Matthew 7:15 with me, I am going to read through verse 20. Today, we are going to consider the idea, the concept, the topic of how to recognize a false teacher. Jesus says in verse 15:

Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles are they? So, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in to the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Jesus here is warning us against false prophets, false teachers who would confuse the matter of what the narrow gate constitutes and give you a false assurance of salvation when perhaps you are not truly saved at all—pointing you in the wrong direction. And so He comes and He says beware of the false prophets as a means to protect those who would seek to enter through the narrow gate.

I have four points for you this morning and some of them are going to have sub points. But first point that I want to talk about just very briefly is:

1. The Definition of a False Prophet

If Jesus is warning us to avoid men such as these, we need to know exactly who it is that He is talking about. Sometimes when we think of the term prophet, we think of men who predicted the future, men who would look in to the future and predict what was going to happen and there were certainly an element of that in the Old Testament ministry of a prophet. But the role of the prophet was more fundamental than that and it was broader than that. In a very basic fundamental sense, these men were the spokesmen for God, they spoke from God, they delivered God's message, they declared His truth and applied the message to their hearers. And even when they spoke about the future as a sub set of the overall ministry that they had, they would make a present application to call their hearers to repentance. And so it was not just a foretelling that they did, a prediction of the future, but there was a forth telling of God's word, they were declaring God's word, they were declaring God's character, God's truth and applying that message to His people.

So then, when Jesus talks about a false prophet, He is simply talking about someone who falsely claims to speak for God, a man gets up and says God says this or that or the Bible says this or that, and he pulls upon himself the mantle of being a spokesman for God when in fact God has not sent him, when in fact he is not speaking the truth.

So we are going to use the term "false prophets" today to refer to false teachers in general—someone saying that I speak for God when in fact he does not. How do you know them? How can you recognize these false teachers? Jesus says watch out for them, beware of them, they are a threat to your spiritual life. If that's the case, how do you recognize them? Let's assume that on this side, we have a man who is truly speaking for God, on the other hand, you have got a man who also says he is speaking for God, but in truth he is not, he is a counterfeit. How do you distinguish the genuine teacher from the false teacher so that you can have the wisdom and discernment to know who to follow—that is the issue that Jesus is concerned to address here in this passage.

And so with that short definition, I want to take you to the second point and that is:

2. The Danger of False Prophets

Understand and remember as we go into this, beloved, that Jesus had just been talking about a broad way that leads to eternal destruction. Eternal destiny is on the line here in this difference between broad way and narrow way. The stakes are enormous, the stakes are eternal, and the stakes affects each one of your souls. As I have said so many times, Jesus is teaching for keeps, this is a matter of extreme importance. And so to have a man over here who is a counterfeit, claiming to speak for God when in fact he doesn't and he is a blind man and he has got followers that are following him, he is leading them to hell and destruction—this is a matter of great significance, this is not simply a matter of

personality. This is a fundamental matter that we need to get right and Jesus graciously tells us how to get it right and to distinguish the true from the false.

So, the danger of false prophets, look at verse 15 with me again, Jesus says:

Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

I want to give you three realities about the danger of false prophets.

First of all is to understand this: False prophets are real. They are genuinely false teachers who claim to speak for God that are lying, that are counterfeits, they are real, they actually exist, they live and move in our world. And the first thing that you need to do to protect yourself from false teachers is to recognize that they exist. Not every man who claims to speak for God actually does. And you need to stay on guard so that you can be aware of this danger and avoid it. Jesus said beware of them, it is a command that calls you to ongoing watchfulness. You must pay attention to this danger so that you can turn your mind away from these false prophets and not be deluded or tricked by their cunning trickery. The Bible repeatedly declares this warning to us.

I am going to give you a couple of verses. I will read them, you can jot them down and look them up later.

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 in to the world.

2 Peter 2:1:

False prophets also arose among the people just as there will also be false teachers among you who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

“Many false teachers...” “There will be false teachers among you...”—the Bible says. And so you have to be on guard because false prophets are real. This is a genuine issue that anyone who cares about their soul should be in tune with and know how to respond to. That’s why Jesus is giving it here in the context of explaining the narrow gate. The consequences are eternal, false prophets are real, we need to pay heed and we need to be able to recognize them.

Now beloved, recognizing false prophets, recognizing false teachers is harder than some people think and make it out to be. People claim to have the gift of discernment and they can easily tell who is true and who is false. Well, if your mind is trained biblically, that’s one thing. But just simple intuition is not going to help you here because the second

aspect of the danger of false prophets is this, they are not only real, they are deceptive. False prophets are deceptive. Look at verse 15 with me again, Jesus says:

Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

They are in sheep's clothing, they look innocent, they look harmless, Jesus says. From external appearance, if you see them from a distance you say, "Ah, a sheep, ah, someone who is like one of us, someone who is also a fellow sheep." And the temptation, the tendency, the thing that these false teachers rely on is that because they have this external appearance, you are going to let your guard down and let them into a position of influence in your life, to follow their teaching, to submit to their authority. If the guy came as an obvious wolf, you wouldn't let him in, and so he disguises himself and tries to get in to the fold where guard is down—they are deceptive.

And here is the thing beloved, here is what that means for you, it's that false prophets usually are not completely outrageous in their conduct, they are not blatant in their deceptions—at least the false prophets that Jesus is addressing here. There are blatant false teachers, there are those who are outrageous in their conduct, but it is not the extreme ones that Jesus is warning you against here, it is those who look closer to the real thing. Counterfeit money is only successful when it approximates the real thing, so it is with counterfeit teachers. You would know for example to turn away from a teacher who just openly said Jesus is a myth—that's a wolf that is out in the open. But these false teachers that Jesus is addressing here today are more subtle, they talk about God, they talk about God's love, they will even talk about Jesus and talk about the cross. And when you hear those kinds of things, speaking as one who is somewhat biblically informed and having your own convictions about these things, when you hear them using those terms, your inclination is to say, "Ah, they mean the same thing by those terms that I do." But so often, particularly in academic circles, these teachers will change the meanings of important terms and while they use the same terminology, they mean something completely different by it. That is part of the deception, that is part of the act, that is how they get people to follow them is because they look true when in fact they are false, they are presenting a counterfeit instead of actual biblical truth—Bible warns us about this beloved. 2 Corinthians 11:14, dealing with this idea of the deceptive nature of false prophets, Apostle Paul said this:

Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness whose end will be according to their deeds.

That means beloved that you have to be aware of the disguises, you have to be aware that there are counterfeits, there are people who are pretenders who claim to speak for God when in fact they don't, when in fact their end is destruction. And those who would follow them would go over the same cliff. Jesus says, "My disciples, that is not what I want for you, I am going to teach you how to avoid them." So they are real, they are deceptive; thirdly, as we talked about the danger of false prophets, they are deadly. Look

at verse 15 with me again, Jesus says, these false prophets in sheep's clothing inwardly are ravenous wolves. The exterior looks safe and cuddly, all love, God is love, everything is well, but inside the picture is completely different.

See beloved, if you knew it was a wolf, you would hide, but because he looks like a sheep, you drop your guard, you leave yourself vulnerable. And that kind of carelessness is the key to a false teacher's success, they thrive on people who are careless about spiritual matters, they thrive on people who do not know their Bibles, they thrive on people who do not think.

Beloved, you are not going to be like that if I have anything to do with it here today. By the power of the word of God, you are not going to be like that, you are not going to be subjects to that kind of threat because with the help of God through His word, you are going to see what the threat is and how to avoid it. You must be on guard, not only for your own life, but for those around you who look to you for direction in spiritual things as well. Understand that this is no idle matter, nothing inconsequential. These men are dangerous, these women are dangerous. Jesus uses this word, "ravenous" to describe them, "inwardly they are ravenous," it comes from a word group that describes robbery or swindlers. False teachers maintain an outward concern for truth and righteousness to one degree or another, but inwardly beloved, (and if you have been in Christian circles for a few years, you have known men like this,) inwardly, they want to use those who follow them to gratify their own sensual lusts, their own greed and their own selfish ambition for power—that's why they are ravenous inside. It is not about ministering to you for the sake of your soul that they are after, it is about accumulating things for themselves and they would sacrifice your soul on their altar of personal ambition. These are not men to be pitied, these are men to be recognized and avoided because beloved, that is what wolves do, wolves rip sheep to shreds, they tear them apart and use them to satisfy their own appetites. And eventually beloved, even if you don't see it at the start, even if it does not manifest itself for a number of years, eventually these false teachers will drop their masks and strike.

And some of you in this room I would venture to say have been left in the wake of men who deceived you and ripped you and hurt you. And so you know the consequences of what Jesus is talking about here, you know it from personal experience—so do I. I know what it is like to follow men who seem to be one thing, but you find out later they are something else—not real pleasant, is it?

Well, Jesus is trying to protect us from that outcome, bless His name. Who are these false teachers? What do they look like? Think of pastors who rule with intimidation. Think of pastors who split church after church after church, always in the name of standing up for the truth and standing up for righteousness—give me a break. Church after church after church, split after split after split?—there is the man to watch out for. Think of pastors who lead women into sin.

On the other hand, on the other side of it, on the other end of the spectrum, think of pastors who speak only to get laughs and speak to entertain and are jovial and boisterous

and self-promoting in the pulpit. Does that sound like a man to you who is taking seriously the eternal consequences of the difference between the broad gate and the narrow gate? Is that the kind of man that you want to lead you, someone who would stand up, sometimes with, sometimes without a Bible in the pulpit and will get up and tell jokes and make you laugh and make you feel good week after week after week? Come on—that's not someone who is taking your soul seriously. I realize that for a time those kind of messages can be fun and you go out kind of lightened up, but it ain't going to be fun beloved on the Day of Judgment—that's why this is so serious. These men don't care for your souls and they don't deserve your allegiance and loyalty and support because they are dangerous, they are deadly—they are wolves and you are sheep.

Apostle Paul understood this threat when he was talking to the Ephesians elders in Acts 20:29. He told the Ephesians elders:

Be on guard for your selves and for all the flock. I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.

Drawing their little power base after them, speaking perverse things, making the way broad, changing the nature of true salvation, threatening the souls of unsuspecting people with their damnable lies. Their judgment, beloved, is going to be severe; I would not want to be in their shoes.

As we talked about the danger of the false prophets, here is what I want to say to you at this point. These false teachers are subtle and they are dangerous, but beloved, bless the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, you do not have to be afraid. You do not have to be vulnerable to such men and women. These teachers are subtle, but you can recognize them when you know the signs to look for. The whole reason that Jesus gives this instruction is to give us discernment, to help us understand so that we can turn away from these false teachers and follow the ones who speak truly for God. This is not a matter of fear; this is a matter of being equipped for battle. We recognize the threat, but Jesus has given us everything that we need here to be able to discern and to continue to walk the narrow path, not being distracted off of it by false teachers who would call us away—bless His holy name. You see in a passage like this how much Jesus Christ truly is the great, good shepherd of the sheep because He protects them and He guards them and He helps them.

How do we protect ourselves? This is where we will spend most of the rest of our time this morning:

3. The Detection of False Prophets

While they are subtle, while they are tricky, they can be exposed. Look at verse 16 with me, Jesus says: “You will know them by their fruits.” He says, “You listen to me; you

will know these men when you see them. They are subtle, but you can pick through the debris and discern them.” He says:

You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in to the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Now just a little structural observation about the passage here. Notice that in verse 16 He says: “You will know them by their fruits.” And then in verse 20, it ends with the exact same phrase: “You will know them by their fruits.” And so verses 16 to 20 form a unit. This phrase, “You know them by their fruit,” serves as a bracket around everything that is in between and everything that is in between is reinforcing and teaching the same basic principle about how you will recognize false teachers, how you will detect them, it is a single theme that He is making here. Jesus uses a simple illustration to make His point.

Think about it beloved, this is not difficult. Where do you find good fruit? You go to a good tree that is bearing fruit. Say, “I want a lemon, I want an apricot.” You go to a lemon tree and pull off a lemon. You go to an apricot tree and pull off an apricot—that’s simple. If you want to know God’s truth, look for the teachers and the leaders who are showing forth good fruit in their lives, truth that is consistent with biblical doctrine, truth that is consistent with the righteousness of God in their own personal lives—it’s not that difficult, but you have to be aware of it to be able to pursue it and to recognize it. You don’t find good fruit on thorn bushes. You don’t find grapes among thistles. No, you go to the right source to find good fruit; this is a general principle of life. And Jesus says, take that basic principle that a child can understand and apply it to your spiritual life as you are observing teachers who would claim to speak for God.

When it comes to spiritual truth, how do you recognize the right source? How do you recognize the true teacher and distinguish him from the false teacher? How do you detect a false prophet? Listen beloved, this is so important. You have to look beyond what he says and in essence, saying, “I speak for God here,” you have to look beyond that and say, “Okay, I hear you say you are claiming to speak for God, now let me examine that claim to see whether it be true.” Just because a man says he speaks for God doesn’t mean that he really does and that is the point that Jesus is teaching here. And the Bible gives us an enormous amount of help on this issue and I hope I am going to be able to convey it to you in the time we have remaining.

Two things about detecting the false prophets: First of all, in detecting false prophets you look at their teaching. You look at the fruit of what their doctrine is. As I have been saying, Jesus in this context had just been talking about the narrow way and then He goes on and says, beware of the false prophets. Beloved, a false prophet does not teach the true narrow way to salvation. False prophets do not teach Jesus’ narrow way, they are strangely (get this, please get this,) they are strangely silent on the very crucial matters that make the way narrow to begin with—there is no narrow way in their teaching. The things that they say about God and Christ and love might be true as far as they go. But it

is what they withhold, what they do not say that exposes them and that you have to be sensitive to. It is not necessarily that they say anything that is directly wrong, they just don't tell you the whole truth. The legal system understands this when witnesses are sworn in, they are to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It would be wonderful if there was a similar oath that someone had to take before he could step in to a pulpit and open up the word of God

Swear a man, really in essence, it is really is what happens, it just doesn't happen externally like it does in the court room. But God is going to evaluate teachers on whether they tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And that beloved is the key through your discernment.

Let me explain that. False teachers, false prophets may talk about Jesus, but they won't tell you that other religions lead to hell. False prophets will ignore or minimize that salvation comes only through Christ, they will minimize the consequences of sin—I'll talk about that in a moment. But they are superficial men who are like the prophets God condemned in Jeremiah 6:14. God condemned those prophets by saying:

They have healed the brokenness of my people superficially, saying peace when there is no peace.

No cause for alarm, all is well, God is love, go in peace, they say and they can make it sound so appealing. Sprinkle in a few Bible verses that you yourself love, but never get around to show them what the real threat is of sin and judgment, never getting around to say that you have something that you need to be saved from, that is your sin and God's coming judgment—those things are strangely silent. When those things are absent, people are never going to be awakened to their need for Christ and their silence is what damns them and their teaching. Using the words “damn” and “damnation” and its literal sense of what God is going to do with them.

Let me give you five questions to ask yourself to help you detect false teachers in their teaching. We want to go through this real quick and just tie one Bible verse to it, but this will be a little primer on discernment.

First of all, ask yourself this question when you are hearing a new teacher or if you know you hear from other churches and ask yourself this about what you are hearing from your own pulpit:

1. When does this man talk about the holiness and wrath of God?--Romans 1:18. Notice in these verses that I am going to give you, pay attention to the universal nature of what they say. Romans 1:18:

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

God's wrath is on this wicked world—when does that teacher talk about that?

2. When does this man talk about eternal judgment and hell? Revelation 20:15:

If any one's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown in to the lake of fire.

When does this teacher talk about that? Listen beloved, two things. If a man really believed those truths, he would be compelled to speak about them. He would not stand up in a pulpit and joke and laugh and entertain week after week, month after month, if he really believed that because he would be compelled by the eternal realities that he knew to be true to speak on the things that really mattered.

Show me a man who just totally seeker sensitive like that, totally into entertaining his audience and I will show you a man who does not believe these truths that we are talking about here today.

Show me a man like that and I will show you a man who does not truly care for the souls that are in front of him. Because if he truly cared about the souls that were in front of him, he would want to wake them up to those realities so that they could flee the wrath that is to come. He would be so weighed down by the reality of souls going in to judgment and facing God and being able to speak and to say something about that and if he loved them at all, he would warn them even if it was an unpopular thing for him to say. He would sacrifice his own popularity for the sake of the souls in front of him. The fact that he does not, the fact that he won't talk about it, shows that he does not believe it and he does not care and therefore is not entitled to the allegiance or loyalty or devotion or support of anyone because the results and the fruit of his teaching are going to show forth in the last day. He is going to be playing his little flute, leading people along, everybody merry and happy until judgment strikes and it is too late.

Beloved, you have the opportunity to discern teachers like that and to turn away from them. And not only that, and I know that for many of you in this room, I am not telling you anything that you have not heard in the pulpit of this church over the years, but you have got to keep that in mind for the people who look to you as well. It is not just you; it is the people who look to you as well.

3. When does he talk about sin and repentance? When does he hold forth the perfect law of God and tell you that you have broken that law and guilt is upon you as a result—when does he tell you that? See, a false teacher does not want to talk about those things because he is afraid it will empty his church. People will get angry and they will leave and then his power base will be diminished, the pool that he has to draw upon for his greed and his lusts and his ambition is going to be diminished. So he steps back and makes the way broad so that more people can follow. So when does he talk about sin and repentance? Because Luke 24:47 says:

Repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in Christ's name to all the nations.

That's the mandate, preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins. When does this man or woman do that? You say he doesn't, then he is not giving you the way to forgiveness of sins—he is leaving you dead in your trespasses, it is a mortal threat to those who hear because of his silence.

4. When does this man talk about justification by faith alone? When does he tell you how you are made right by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to your account and receiving that gift by faith alone? When does he do that? Romans 3:28, Paul says:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

What Paul taught, when does this teacher get around to talking about those things?

5. When does this man talk about the substitutionary atonement of Christ? When does he talk about the truth and meaning of the death of Christ on the cross? Isaiah 53:6:

All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. (referring to Christ)

When does this teacher talk about that, when does he get around to it? Now, understand, a guy can't talk about all of that stuff in one message. I understand that. I guess I just did, didn't I? (laughter) That just occurred to me. No, we are talking about judging the course of the man's ministry, what are the themes that mark his teaching? It is not fair to judge a guy on one message when he has a bad day. What is he like over the long haul? Because if a teacher believes these things, he would speak of them, if he does not speak on them, his silence is deafening because he is being silent on the fundamental points of the gospel and is leading people down the broad path that leads to destruction. So examine his teaching when you are detecting a false prophet.

Secondly, it is not just their teaching that you can examine though, examine their lifestyle. This point is apparent from the context of the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes opened up with Jesus describing to whom the kingdom of heaven even belonged to. He said in Matthew 5:3:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven.

A proud, boisterous, self-promoting man is not even in the kingdom of heaven at all. A guy who does not know something of brokenness of spirit before a holy God is not even a Christian, let alone a true teacher. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit. At what point in that man's life does he exhibit that characteristic? True Christians are marked by Matthew 5:6:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Where is his thirst for righteousness? Where does he manifest a desire for the righteousness that God requires? That is a fair question, that is the question that you should be asking when teachers come in to your life. Further, this whole matter of their lifestyle comes up in our passage that we are looking at next week, Matthew 7:21, look at it with me, Jesus says:

Not every one who says to me "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter.

Take that and apply it directly to the false teacher who says, "Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Lord." Okay, great, I agree, Jesus is Lord. What about your life, Sir? Don't be afraid to ask those questions. Jesus is basically commanding us to ask those questions because He is saying beware, pay attention, and be on guard. You see beloved, keep this in mind, talk is cheap. False prophets thrive on smooth talk and appearances that may trick you in to thinking that they are the real thing. But beloved, if I could say anything to you in kind of colloquial language, don't be a sucker. Don't be a sucker for men like that because eventually, what is in their hearts will come out. Beloved, when you see an arrogant teacher or when you see a man who has been living a double life of sin that comes out eventually, you can know that you are looking at a false prophet right in front of your eyes and you say, "This is what Jesus was talking about." So you test their claim to speak for God because those trees are going to get cut down and thrown in to the fire. They may fool us for a while, but God will triumph in the end.

Now what do you do if you have been exposed to a false teacher? How do you respond? Just a few suggestions as I close up, this takes just a couple of minutes

4. Dealing with False Teachers

We talked about their reality, we talked about their danger, we talked about detecting them, now we talk about how to deal with false teachers. I want to give you four little things to help you on this matter:

1. Hold to principle over personality. I would venture to say that for people that we have known in particular, this is where we are most weak. You should not make excuses for false teachers. They have to be accountable to God and when they stand up and teach, they are calling greater judgment and accountability on themselves. If they violate God's biblical teaching and if they show forth sin in their lifestyle, don't make excuses for them. Jesus commands you to turn away from them.
2. If you find yourself under the ministry of a false teacher (and in part I am thinking of people who are not here and who will hear this later, I am speaking to them as well as to you here in this room) if you find yourself under the ministry of a false teacher and you come to recognize, next thing I would say is remove yourself from his influence. Jesus says beware, turn away from them and that means you don't listen to their teaching and you remove yourself from their authority. Leave the church if you know the man is a

false teacher and if they threaten you with excommunication and you have biblical grounds for saying “this man is false,” take the excommunication rather than follow the man who is false. You have to beware, you have to be on guard.

3. Withdraw your support. Don’t enable their ministry with your time and resources. You isolate them like we talked about from 2 John a few weeks ago. You don’t help them continue in their false ministry.
4. Leave their final judgment to God because it is easy to get wrapped up in the question of, “Is this man even a Christian or not? I see his ministry is bad, but is he even a Christian?” Don’t worry yourself with that question because that is not your final judgment to make. Let God take care of that. Your responsibility is to get out of the realm of danger so that that wolf cannot attack you.

Now beloved, these are weighty issues that call for serious understanding and discernment. But don’t be gullible before every huckster that comes along and claims to speak for God; in the great grace of God, you don’t have to be. He says you will know them by their fruits. Our Lord has given us what we need to discern the pretenders from the real ones and to walk down the narrow path that leads to eternal life—what a great grace He has given to us, amen? Let’s pray.

Father, guard our paths and guide us in this crucial matter of discernment that we might honor Christ by following true men of God who truly speak for you. Father, you have exposed the many false prophets and false teachers who are around, and so protect your sheep from their deadly influence. We thank you for the grace that is ours in Christ and we pray that you would help us to this end. In Jesus’ name. Amen.