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Who Do You Follow? (II) Matthew 7:15-23  
GPBC  
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Introduction – As we mentioned last week, we all have influences in our lives. In some matters how we are influenced has very little consequence or impact on our lives, it's just simple choices we make in life. In other matters though, those who influence us impact our lives in tremendous ways, either for our good or for our undoing. None matter so much as the spiritual influencers we allow to shape and direct our lives. Those around us and those we give attention to are either drawing us closer to the Lord or farther from Him.

Such is the central point of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is drawing a distinction between false faith and true faith so that we might be able to know the difference between the two, so that we might not be numbered among those who claim to know the Lord but actually do not believe, and so that we might be able to detect and stay away from those who would lead us astray.

As Jesus is drawing the sermon to a close, He emphasizes over and over again that this issue of false faith and true faith is of utmost importance, for either we are on a path to the eternal joy of our soul or we are on a path to the eternal peril of our soul.

And so He commands “enter the narrow gate,” and He warns, “Beware of false prophets.”

- I. A False Prophet is Not Immediately Identifiable (v15)
  - a. False prophets are not so easy to recognize at first because they appear to be one of us. They appear in sheep's clothing.
  - b. They use the same words we use, but they have very different meanings for those words. They claim to love Jesus, but their Jesus is not the Jesus we find in Scripture. They claim to hold to the Word of God, but their teaching comes from another source. They look and sound initially like a follower of God, but inwardly Jesus says they are ravenous wolves.
  - c. So how are we to identify them if they look like sheep?

- II. Fruit Inspection is the Reliable Identifier (vv16-20)
  - a. The fruit of their lives, the fruit of their ministry, the fruit of their teaching allows us to discern whether or not they are of the faith.
  - b. 7 Ways to identify a false prophet by their fruit.
    - i. A false prophet always focuses the attention on himself rather than the Lord. He is the center of attention in his sermons, in his illustrations, in his scriptural examples, and in his day to day life rather than pointing others to Christ.
      - 1. 6:1,2,5,16
    - ii. A false prophet will at some point deny a central, core truth about Christ.
      - 1. 1 John 4:1-3
    - iii. A false prophet will somehow undermine the gospel message that we are saved through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone.
      - 1. Galatians 1:6-9
    - iv. A false prophet will disrupt the spiritual growth of believers and the health of the local church.
      - 1. 3 John 9-11
    - v. A false prophet will use spiritual language to cloak, conceal, and justify sinful behavior.
      - 1. Jude 3-4
    - vi. A false prophet loves and boasts in his following not to the good of his followers or to the glory of God but for his own selfish gain and the ruin of his followers.
      - 1. Matthew 23:13-15
    - vii. A false prophet will tell you exactly what you want to hear and not what you need to hear.
      - 1. 2 Timothy 4:1-5
      - 2. 1 Thess 5:1-6
  - c. There will always be those among us who claim to speak for God, who claim to be believers, who claim to guide us spiritually to truth. There will always be those around us who seem to be living the good life, to have all the answers, but in the end are not pointing us to Christ, not proclaiming the gospel of grace, and not building up the local church body. We must be careful and discerning. We must beware of false prophets who look like sheep but are really wolves.

- d. Have we allowed harmful, spiritual influences into our lives?
  - i. Has our spiritual growth been disrupted?
  - ii. Are we influenced by someone who always has good reasons to do wrong things?
  - iii. Has the influence of someone given you a negative view of the local church?
  - iv. Are you impressed with someone who thinks of Jesus as nothing more than a ticket to heaven? Than a good example? Nothing at all?

### III. The Importance of Knowing Your Influencers (vv21-23)

- a. V19.21-23. Be careful of the people you follow. Enter the narrow gate.
- b. Oh how crafty and deceitful are false faith and false prophets. Just because someone claims to know God, be for God, and work for God is no guarantee they are of God. Ill. Pharisees
  - i. True faith is more than lip service – v21. True faith involves a life transformation. – 1 Cor 5:17
  - ii. True faith is more than checking off a list.
    - 1. Prophecy is not a guarantee of true faith. Balaam spoke the words of the Lord in Numbers but he was a lover of money, not God. Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, but he was not a believer. The gospel calls for faith and repentance, not prophesying.
    - 2. Casting out demons and doing mighty works is not a guarantee of true faith. Judas was among the 12 whom Jesus anointed to go throughout the cities and cast out demons and do many mighty works, but Judas was not a believer.
    - 3. You see, God is sovereign enough to use anyone to accomplish His will, believer or unbeliever. The question of your salvation is not what great thing have you done, what box have you checked. The question is in whom do you believe? Have you repented? Do you treasure and follow Christ?
- c. How can you tell? V23 – workers of lawlessness. It's the life that tells the truth. Fruit inspection is the only way to discern. If their lives

depart from honoring the Lord, giving glory to the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord – it doesn't matter if they say they love Jesus, or know Jesus, or if they claim that everything is good with them and the man upstairs, when their lives don't match their profession!

- d. How do we discern true prophets and our own salvation? V21 – the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
  - i. John 6 and 1 John 3 say the will of the Father is that we believe in His Son!
  - ii. You see when we truly believe in Jesus, when we truly embrace Jesus and treasure Jesus and rely on Jesus for forgiveness and life – it straightens out our doctrine! We know salvation is only by grace! It transforms our lives! We turn from self-praise and self-worship to praise and glory of Christ. We seek to bring Him glory. We love His people. We desire to please Him. True faith changes a person inside out and upside down. It's a new life from a new heart that's been given a new direction, a new affection, and new destination.

Conclusion – Analysis and inspection. Talitha and I visited Matt Mathis a few weeks ago at the Charlotte Police Department. He took us on a very fascinating tour of all the various forensic rooms, documents, dna, guns and weapons, fingerprints. It was amazing to see all the science and detail that goes in to analyzing the evidence.

That's precisely what Jesus is calling us to do for the sake of our souls. Analyze the evidence. What path are you taking today? The wide path to destruction or the narrow path to life? And who led you down that path? Examine the fruit, and flee to Christ. Don't be numbered among those who will one day hear the most dreaded, terrifying words that will ever be heard, "I never knew you, depart from me."