

Discerning the Path

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Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, tonight, Lord, we recognize, we acknowledge that you are still in the miracle-doing business. And God, we confess that what we read throughout the scriptures, the Old Testament, the New Testament, even as we look back in time and history, and even in our own lives, we will testify, and God, we confess that we have seen you move what we consider the immovable. And yet, God, today, we look at situations and struggles and doubts and questions in our own life and we question whether you're capable of doing that which you've done so many times in days past. God, we recognize you as the miracle worker and tonight, God, we pray that you would do a miracle work in our lives, that we would open up your word, that we would see what you have spoken, not just in days past, but today present. And God, we pray that the ultimate miracle tonight is that you would do a work in our hearts, that we would trust you, that we would live for you, and that we would take heed to your word. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Tonight, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of Matthew chapter 7 and now as you're turning to Matthew chapter 7, just a somewhat elongated introduction for those that may be new to us either in person or online. On Sunday evenings, we've been in a very, shall I say, slow journey through the gospel of Matthew and there's a reason that we're walking through Matthew so slowly on Sunday night, and here is the reason. Not because it's the first book in your New Testament but because it is that book of the Bible that I believe, if we can grasp Matthew, it allows us to grasp the totality of the scripture. Yes, it brings us out of the Old Testament, out of 430 years of silence from the mouth of God, but it actually projects us all the way to what we know as the prophetic ending of the Bible, the book of Revelation. It connects those dots. It transitions us from the temple of God to your body being the temple of the Holy Spirit. It takes us from the Old Covenant to the New, the Old Testament to the New Testament, and it serves as a means of bringing the entire message of scripture within one simple context.

That being said, in Matthew chapter 5, we began probably the most famous section or message from the lips of Jesus Christ himself, the Sermon on the Mount, and allow me just to revisit some things about the Sermon on the Mount that are very critical for our study tonight. First and foremost, let me remind us that there were absolutely no born-again Christians at the Sermon on the Mount. Now I didn't say there weren't people that

followed Jesus. There were no born-again Christians. And the reason I make that designation or that distinction is this: to be a born-again believer in Jesus Christ is to believe upon his sacrificial death, his glorious resurrection, and to be indwelt with the Holy Spirit. There's not a single person in Matthew 5-7 who's had that experience. Why? Because every single person that was in the audience at some level was going about the sacrificial system thinking that their deeds and their religious acts made them right with God and that's why this passage is so important, because Jesus Christ takes that framework, he takes that perspective, and just like the rest of the gospel of Matthew, he transitions us to understand that there are no amount of deeds, there's no amount of religion, there is no amount of sacrifice that will ever truly make us right with God. In fact, what he's doing in the Sermon on the Mount is leading us to a very important conclusion that every single one of us, and he tells this parable at the end, we're going to build our lives either upon a rock or shifting sand. The storms will come in life and the question is how are we allowed our lives to be built, is our life on the rock that is Christ Jesus or the shifting sand which is anything else.

And so what Jesus does is he exposes us for our sinful condition and state within the Sermon on the Mount. He begins in chapter 5. by making it very clear that all of us have transgressed, trespassed, or committed some type of sin toward one another. We've done something we shouldn't have done. We've spoken a word we shouldn't have spoken. We've had a thought that we should not have had toward one another, which puts us in a sinful state. And just by chance, if you think, "Well, I've never wronged anybody," then in chapter 6, he compares our lives to his standard in relationship to him. Have we ever prayed in vain? Have we ever sacrificed in vain? And really, when you get to chapter 7, you discover that every single one of us has done what Romans 3:23 says, we have "fallen short."

As we enter into chapter 7, he warns us to be careful about judging other people's lives before you've inspected your own. He warns us that we should love one another by the same standard that we would desire to be loved. And then in verse 13, there is a dramatic twist, there's a hard right turn in the Sermon on the Mount because for the first time, rather than showing us what truth is versus the errors we believed, he actually commissions us to do something. Verse 13 begins with, "Enter ye into the strait gate." So in other words, with all this evidence that we have, with all this information, with all this data, what do we do with it? He says,

13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. 15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. 16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 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, neither 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.

Now this is an important passage on several fronts, but on the outset, here's what Jesus Christ is saying, he's essentially telling the audience, do you realize that over the course of what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, that he has communicated to us a message that is completely contrary, different, and unique compared to everybody else. And what he is basically saying is, "You've got a choice. You either heed what I'm telling you, or you follow another path." But be warned, all of those voices that are "in competition," as he said, are, "false prophets." And how do you judge it? By their fruit.

So what's this famous statement that Jesus makes? Strait is the way, harrow is the means, but broad is the road to destruction. Now, this is not a statement that is without precedent. In fact, in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4, a very famous statement says, "Hear, O Israel, the LORD your God is one God." Now we know that the Israelites, particularly in the Old Testament, lived in a world of polytheism, multiple gods, multiple beliefs, sacrifice to whatever entity could get you what you needed or desired at the time, and the Israelites were so distinct because they believed there was only "one true God." In fact, just a little antidote about Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 4, if you were ever to pursue, and I don't necessarily recommend it because of the difficulty, but if you wanted to pursue an understanding of the language of the Old Testament, what we know as Hebrew, one of the things you'll discover is the Hebrew language does not use capital letters. Everything's in the lowercase, okay? You say, "Well, why is that important?" Because there's only one verse in the Hebrew Bible that uses capital letters. It's Deuteronomy 6:4. It's almost as if God is screaming at us to pay attention to this one. On the word "Hear," remember "Hear, O Israel," the word "Hear" is capitalized. Think in terms of today's word. You ever gotten an email with capital letters? People are screaming at you, are they not? So just think in those terms, when you're reading, I mean you've read Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and you're five chapters through Deuteronomy, and all of a sudden it's like God has pushed the all caps button and he's screaming at you, right? "Listen to this, the LORD your God is one." The word "one" is capitalized. There's a distinction, there is a difference between everything the one true God preaches and teaches and what everybody else believes.

Interesting, the book of Proverbs, it's in chapter 14, 16, and a host of other places, there's this phrase that keeps popping up. It says there is a way that seems right unto man, but it ends up being the road to destruction. Now, I think that little letter and word "a" is critical there. There is "a way" that seems right to men, not "the way" that seems right. And let me put this in today's vernacular: Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, but there's a million roads to hell. There is "a way" that seems right to men. For some people it's a religious way, for others it's a secular way, for others it's a whatever it may be way. There is a way that seems right, but it is a road to destruction.

So here's the pronouncement. You walk through the gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you make your way to literally the last night before Jesus' crucifixion, beginning in the gospel of John chapter 13, we call it the farewell discourse, and there Jesus has

washed the disciples' feet. For three and a half years he's taught, he's done miracles, he's done all the things that we know of in the gospels. There in chapter 14, there's a man who speaks up who we've unfortunately have given him an adjective, we call him Doubting Thomas, right? I'll be honest with you, I'm kind of a fan of Doubting Thomas. You say, "Well, why would you be a fan of a man with such a bad reputation?" Because in chapter 14 of the gospel of John, he asked the question that everybody else was thinking. Remember, Jesus begins that great chapter, "If you believe in God, believe also in me. For in my house, my Father's house, are many mansions. If it were not so, I would tell you. I go to prepare a place." I mean, it's a great passage. How many times have we been at a memorial or funeral service where we've heard this passage quoted? And then Thomas. I love this, he says, "Jesus, how can we know the way?" Now, some people would claim he's doubting. I just think he's very wise because you know what Thomas was familiar with? Proverbs. He knew there's a way that seemed right unto man but it leadeth to destruction and so he asked, "Jesus, how can we know?" And it is there in John 14:6 that that famous statement, Jesus said, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. Nobody comes to the Father but by me."

That's a pretty clear pronouncement that Jesus makes at the very end of his earthly ministry, continuing this thought about entering into the strait gate, and then there's the propagation. We know that Jesus dies on the cross, three days later, raises from the grave, teaches the apostles for 40 days, he ascends up into the heavens, and then we have what we call the book of Acts and within the book of Acts, we see the Lord moving through the Holy Spirit in those early believers' lives, the propagation, the formation of the early church. There in Acts chapter 4, there's a statement that's made in verse 12, "Neither is there salvation in any other name whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus Christ." Now lest you think that was just a propagation or a teaching of those early apostles who, no offense, had drunk the Kool-Aid, so to speak, you know there was a man named Saul of Tarsus, right? Saul of Tarsus in the book of Acts actually had legal permission from the state government to apprehend and, if necessary, take the lives of people who believed in Jesus. That's why he was on the road to Damascus. He meets Jesus in a miraculous testimony there in Acts chapter 9. He becomes, rather than the one persecuting, he becomes the preacher on behalf of what we know as the early church. Now, what we know as 1 and 2 Timothy are the last books of the Bible that the Lord used him to give us. He's at the end of his life. He's 30 years down the road. He's about to face a Roman execution for what he believes. You know what he says in 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 5? "There is one mediator between man and God, the man Christ Jesus." And the reason this is important is because when Jesus makes this statement, "strait is the way, narrow is the way," this was not some new revolutionary on the spot of the moment teaching. This was something that God had been teaching since Deuteronomy. This was something that Jesus would continue to teach that the early church would teach.

But then he warns us in verse 15 to beware of false prophets. Why would he warn us of this? Because there will be those, both as individuals and entities, who will do as John chapter 10 says, he will come as the hireling, will slip in the back gate and somehow try to talk us out of this very difficult but necessary truth. It says there will be false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. So let's talk

about these false prophets tonight because they didn't just exist in Jesus' day, they didn't just exist in the Old Testament day, they exist in our day as well. So who are these individuals? Well, the Bible refers to them as "false prophets," and one of the distinctions that we need to make is the issue of "office to begin with." You say, "What do you mean 'office to begin with'?" Well, in the Old Testament, the Lord utilized a variety of men to be prophets on his behalf. A prophet had a twofold function. They were to foretell and they were to forth-tell. Let me show you the difference. To foretell something is to tell you something that's going to happen in advance of knowledge of, saying hundreds of years from now, thousands of years from now this will occur. Don't get me wrong, that was an important part of the prophets but did you know that mathematically or statistically, that was actually the lesser of the functions? The primary function of the prophets wasn't to say what's happening down the road, the primary function was to communicate the cold, hard truth that nobody wanted to hear in their ears. That's why the prophets of old lived the existence that they did. That's why they were marginalized. And much like today, we joke about this in our culture that when it comes to musicians and artists and thinkers and philosophers, we often say their work is never worth anything until they're dead. Why? Because we realize at the time, "Eh, it's okay. It's not that big a deal." After they're no longer here, we're like, "Wow. Look at what we've missed out on."

And such were the prophets. I've got news for you, the prophets of the Old Testament were not best-selling authors. They were not the beloved of the community. You don't believe me? Look at Ezekiel. Spent 300+ days on his side on a river with only the birds feeding him. In the book of Hebrews in your New Testament, chapter 1 verse 1, it makes this statement, it says, "God, who in sundry places and diverse manners, he spoke unto us in days past by the prophets, has now spoken unto us by his Son, Jesus Christ." And when you look at your New Testament, when you look at the early church, one of the things that you have to distinguish is the "office of a prophet," versus what we might call the spiritual gift of prophecy. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 10, it does say that a spiritual gift that God gives a child of God, can be what we call the gift of prophecy. You say, "Well, what's the gift of prophecy?" Well, the gift of prophecy is this Holy Spirit-driven ability to not only kind of know what's coming down the road, but a, listen, a willingness to speak truth in a world that is chocked full of error.

Now, the gift of prophecy is different than the "office of being a prophet." Now, what's the difference? If you possess the office of a prophet, then when you say, "Thus saith the Lord," you can write it down and stick it in the Bible. I would argue tonight that biblically speaking the office of the prophet is no longer viable, but the gift of prophecy is necessary for the body of Christ.

So what's the objective? What is the objective of a false prophecy? In just a moment, we're going to kind of walk through how these individuals operate and how they work but we have to discover, okay, so what are they doing? Number 1, I would believe they claim to possess an office which is not viable. We'll discuss that in just a moment. What is their objective? What's their "end game"? Well, according to the book of Jude, by the way, if you ever want to have fun with somebody, ask them to turn to Jude chapter 2, just see what they do. One simple chapter right before the book of Revelation. In Jude, verse 4, it

talks about false prophets who have crept in. See, if you creep in, you're much like that hireling of John chapter 10. And what is their goal? To deny the Lord Jesus Christ. The ultimate end game of a false prophet is to deny Jesus and to place the focus on themselves.

According to Matthew chapter 23, Jesus called the Pharisees false prophets. Now this is important in just a few moments when we walk how these individuals operate, that a Pharisee, one who put the attention on themselves and not the Messiah who was right there, Jesus had some very strong words for them. In fact, I would say the strongest words that Jesus had for anybody were those religious leaders who communicated false prophetic statements in the midst of a one true Messiah that was right next to them. Jesus made some interesting statements in Matthew chapter 23. He called these false prophets whitewashed tombs. Boy, you are pretty on the outside but you're full of nothing but dead men's bones. He even said that those that they have converted to their way are twice the children of hell than themselves. Then there's 2 Corinthians chapter 11 which says marvel not that Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light and has his ministers do so as well.

Now if you were to kind of take this objective and peel away the layers, basically when the Bible speaks of false prophets it's not speaking about people "out there" that are saying some of the most ridiculous things that you could ever imagine. A false prophet "is someone in here" who cloaks themselves with the garment of Christianity, who has a Bible in their hand and twists and turns the scripture just enough to sound like the real deal, to appear to be the real thing, but it is corrupt, it is deceitful, and it is deadly at its core. If you'll allow me to use a very secular and menial example. If you were to play the great sport of baseball at somewhat of a high level. Now I never played, I didn't play at the highest level. I didn't even play at the higher level, if that makes sense. But that being said, if you are standing in the batter's box of a major league baseball game, all right, and you're there, do you realize that you have one sixth of a second to decide whether to swing the bat or not? One sixth of a second. Can I illustrate that for you? That's all it is. That's how quick you have to make the decision. Now that's whether to swing the bat or not, right? But here's the thing, you know there is a reason that a pitcher hides the ball in his glove. You know why, right? He doesn't want you to know what's about to come. There's different pitches, there's fast balls, there's curve balls, there's sliders, there's all kinds of things, right? And he hides that ball in his glove, and when his hand comes forth, you have one sixth of a second, not only to decide whether I'm gonna swing the bat or not, but is this ball coming in straight or is it curving? And oftentimes, and you'll hear coaches say this all the time, is pick up the spin. What they mean by that is this, listen, if you can see me, I want you to see this, the difference in the fingers doing this and the fingers doing that from 60 feet, 6 inches away. Fingers in the 12 o'clock position or the two to three o'clock position. That's it.

You say, "Why is that critical?" Because that's the illustration of a false prophet. You think you're getting a fastball and you get a curve ball. Or you think you're getting a curve ball and you get a fastball. The mannerisms are the same. The uniform is the same. Everything is the same except the position of the fingers and so when Jesus uses this

illustration, he talks about these objectives, he says, "So how do we know what we have to work with?" Well, in baseball we would say, pick up the spin. Jesus said, look at the fruit. What is coming out of them? What is a byproduct of their lives.

So what's the standard for judging fruit? Now, I know you expect to hear this. It sounds like an elementary school, Sunday school answer, but it's the truth: the standard for judging fruit is the word of God, scripture. So let me tell you how false prophets use the Bible under the cloak of Christianity to throw a curve ball when you think you're getting a fastball. There's three ways they do it. The first way is this, that they add to the Bible things the Bible does not contain. That is a predatory approach upon biblical ignorance to convince you the Bible says something the Bible does not say. Now, can I be humorous? How many times have you heard somebody say this, "Well, the Bible says that cleanliness is next to godliness." The Bible doesn't say that. Mama says that, alright? There are a lot of statements that people in positions of somewhat authority with the Bible in their hand will make to make you think that's actually what the Bible says and it's not actually what the Bible says.

The second way is they will subtract from the Bible. This is a very subtle methodology wherein the context of a verse, they'll drop one word here or another word there. By the way, this is the methodology that Satan originally used in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. In Genesis chapter 3 verse 1, the serpent comes to Eve and he questions the word of God and what he does is he quotes Genesis 2:16. Now, in the English translation, there are 10 words that God gives Adam about how to operate in the garden, "Of every tree of the garden, you may freely eat, except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and do not eat." Okay? Did you know that when Satan repeats that to Eve in Genesis 3:1, he drops one word? You know what that word is? Freely. What does that mean? It means the best lies are 90% true and the most subtle false prophets, 90% of what they say is actually biblically defensible. It's the other 10% that we've got to watch for.

And then finally, there is the taking out of context. Boy, this is a frequent one. You go into the Bible, by the way, 66 books, over a million words, and you pick two or three words here or five or six words here you pull them out of their context and you make them say whatever you want them to say. We dealt with this a couple weeks ago. Remember Matthew chapter 7 verse 1, "Do not judge." How many times have we heard that lately? But what did Jesus say, "Do not judge lest you be judged for the measure which you judge, it shall be done to you." Jesus wasn't saying you don't judge. Jesus was saying don't be a hypocrite. There's a big difference.

So, here are the specifics. How does a "false prophet," how do they propagate this false fruit, so to speak, in our lives? I'm gonna walk through these, and then I'm gonna give a somewhat historical illustration and then a "gospel of Matthew relation." First thing they do is they minimize or they rationalize or explain away sin. That's the first step. You've got to find a way to make sin not near as bad as what God says it is. Secondly, you humanize or over-personify who God is. You basically make God human. Thirdly, is you deify man by elevating his status. So to repeat these three, you basically rationalize or justify sin, you make God man and man God, that's what you do. Fourthly, you provide

or you promote self-atonement through deeds, religion, listen to this one, or self-realization. And finally, you dismiss hell and eternity, and you promote "heaven on earth."

Let me use somewhat of a, shall I say, shameful historical example. We have a phrase in our culture today, we utilize it in all kinds of contexts, and I've already spoken of it tonight. When someone says, "Oh, don't drink the Kool-Aid," you realize the phrase "don't drink the Kool-Aid" comes from the actions and the fruit of a false prophet, Jim Jones. Jim Jones who took over 900 people down south and he had them "Kool-Aid drink with that which would kill them." He forced them to promote their, or to provide their allegiance to him. They had to "drink the Kool-Aid." You realize we have a statement in our culture today in regards to, let's just say for example, that a sports team is projected to be better than you think it will be, people will say, "Well, don't be drinking the Kool-Aid now." In other words, don't take into account that which is not actually true.

Look at the fruit. You know, you would think throughout the time and scope of history, humanity would learn our lessons, but we never do. Jim Jones provided Kool-Aid. 30 years ago, 30 years ago, there was an individual in Waco, Texas who did the same. Now, I'm kind of a unique soul within the room. I was a resident of Waco, Texas when that famous event took place. I was seated on a Sunday morning in church just like most of you were this morning, in fact, a sanctuary that looked a whole lot like this, I was seated right over there on the second row. Do you know what my job was? I was the youth ministry associate. My job was not to look at the pastor. My job was to stare down teenagers. That was my job. So, in the context here, you understand that I wasn't looking up here, I was looking out there. I was the one with that eye, "I'm watching you," right? You say, "Well, why is that important?" Because I'll never forget that day. I was looking out at the audience. It was about 11:20 in the morning, maybe 11:25, the sermon portion of the service had just started. See, that's when I really had to pay attention to teenagers because when they sat down, they didn't have cell phones back then, but that's when they started passing notes and, you know, doing all kinds of things. So that's when I went on the clock, if you know what I mean. So I'm watching and I saw something I'll never forget. On the far right hand side from my perspective up here, there was an individual and on this side, both of them stood up. They stared at each other and they ran out the back door. I knew those were FBI agents. I knew them. Their kids were in our student ministry. They ran out those back doors. Our pastor, eyes got as big as saucers, and he said, "Church," he said, "I don't know what's going on, but it's big." He said, "Why don't we just pray and go home?" While he was praying, we heard the alarms and the sirens going off, 52 different municipalities would send their fire, ambulance and law enforcement support to a siege that would last for 53 days.

We can talk about drinking the Kool-Aid all day long, but nobody ever is going to forget Waco, Texas. And I'll never forget during those days as the dust was settling, David Koresh, he struck a deal with the "powers at be." Here was his deal. He said, "I will give you what you want in one of these small manners if you allow me," some of you may not remember this, "60 minutes, no commercial interruptions, just open airwaves to promote my position." I remember sitting in the car. I remember listening to this man who had

people hemmed up in his compound do his explanation of the book of Revelation. Now, you know what's fascinating about his explanation? About 90% of it was spot on. See, if you only listened to 54 minutes of it, you might have thought he was telling the truth. If you only listened to 45 minutes of it, you might have thought, maybe this guy really knows what he's talking about. See, here was the difference. I listened to the whole thing and it was about minute 55 where everything went sideways. In other words, he revealed the true nature and fruit of who he was.

Now history, obviously, has declared the errors of his way but in brief tonight, let me talk about what we witnessed 30 years ago. The minimization and the rationalization of sin. You do realize David Koresh took everybody else's wife, right? He basically said, "Oh, there's sin in the Bible, but not mine." He rationalized sin. He minimalized sin. Do we have people in our culture today who are rationalizing sin? Absolutely we do, and some of them preach in churches and have a Bible in their hands. They are false prophets is who they are.

What about the humanization or the over-personification of God? How did David Koresh do this? How do people do this today? Anytime you hear somebody project their emotions on God, this is what they're doing. In other words, God would just understand if this is how you responded or God sees it the way that you see it. Basically, what you do is you take God and his status of being God and you lower him to one who has the same emotions desires and struggles that you do. Last time I checked the Bible, it says, "I am God and there is no other."

There is the deification of man by "elevating his status." I mentioned earlier, I believe that there's biblical evidence that there is no longer the "office of the prophet," but if people convince you there is, then they've just elevated themselves above you. They've just taken a position that is not to be theirs. So what did David Koresh do? He convinced, and by the way, he didn't just convince people of the back roads of religion, you do realize that people in his compound had advanced degrees from higher institutions of learning. You realize there were people in his compound that had great wealth, financial means and connections. But what did he do? He did not just convince them he was a prophet. He convinced them he was a messiah, that if his life was to be lost, he would come back from the grave. To this day, this may blow some of your minds, you do know there's still a big concrete pad outside of Waco, Texas where all that thing went down. To this date, on the day of David Koresh's death, there are still people that show up hoping for his return. Good grief is right. Why? Because he somehow, he elevated himself so high up that people thought of him as one beyond his actual true position.

What about self-atonement through deeds, religion, or self-realization? What did David Koresh do? He basically said, if you'll strap on the gun and fight a badge, you're on the right side. His self-realization was from a militaristic perspective. But let me speak to today's concept. We have minimized sin. We've allowed people to lower God in who he is, elevate themselves, and they've basically made a God out of self-identification, that you find who you really are with declaring who you are in spite of how God made you.

See, this isn't just drinking Kool-Aid, folks. In fact, most of the Kool-Aid that we get today comes right through the TV.

And last but not least, they dismiss hell and promote a "heaven on earth." It's about what I can experience, what I can acquire, or what I can be in the now. It's not about the here and now, it's about the now. Jim Jones talked about an existence and experience of now. David Koresh spoke about an existence of now. And so do the false prophets of today. It's about who are you, who do you desire to be, what do you want to claim, who do you want to be right now.

So what's the solution? And by the way, we'll discuss this next time we walk through Matthew. When you get to the next section of Matthew 7, you know who Jesus basically calls out as the greatest of all false prophets? The Pharisees. The Pharisees. So what's the solution? How do you and I, I hate to use this term, how do we inspect the fruit? How do we know if it's good or not? How do we know if it's ripe or not? How do we know what we're actually dealing with? Well, first thing is you need some discernment. Now I'm of the belief that the contemporary modern church, the one thing we need maybe more than anything else is we need discernment and discernment is the ability to determine is it of God or is it not of God. Now the simple Sunday school answer is this, and I don't mean to be overly, I don't mean to be a simpleton: does it line up with scripture or not? And I don't mean the scripture that you've added, subtracted, or taken out of context. Does it line up with, "Thus saith the Lord"? But 1 John chapter 4 says, discern and test the spirits to see if they are of God. Now I'm going to make this real personal and real relevant to your lives. This may sound strange, but I'm going to say it. I want to challenge you never take what I say at face value. Never. Judge everything I say by the word of God. That's how false prophets rise to promotion. They say, "Just trust me, I'm the pastor." Don't trust the pastor. Trust the scripture. And if the pastor lines up with the scripture, then because of the scripture, you can trust the pastor.

Did you see what I just did there? In other words, don't take any book you read, any podcast you hear, or any sermon you hear, don't take it just because they said it. "Well, but they're Baptist." I don't care. Baptists are all messed up. All right? It doesn't matter. They can be Baptist. They can be this. They can be that. "Well, you don't understand." No, no, no. Don't. Test the spirits. See if it is actually of God. Does it line up with scripture? Oftentimes, we fall into the traps of false prophets because of their pedigree. their connections, their reputation, or somebody we know and trust says, "This guy, he's good." You do understand that David Koresh had a host of people in his compound that showed up with advanced degrees and a host of wealth because somehow, someway, they got convinced that he was actually telling the truth when he was telling just the opposite.

And finally, determination. I love that little book of Jude. We talked about verse 4 earlier. It talks about the false prophets creeping in but do you know what it says in verse 3? Contend for the faith. And I love what verse 3 of the book of Jude says. It just is so real. The author of this little book of the Bible basically tells this congregation, "When I came unto you, I wanted to encourage you. I wanted to exhort you. Basically, I wanted to tell you what you wanted to hear, but I can't. I need you to contend for the faith. I need you to

fight for the faith. Why? Because the faith is at stake. There are false prophets who have and are creeping in. They want to deny Jesus and tear up the 'whole thing'." You and I today, we can laugh about Jim Jones and Kool-Aid, we can snicker at David Koresh and his compounds but what books do you read? What podcasts do you listen to? Whose ministries do you financially support? It just got real, did it not? "Oh, but my sister says..." I don't care. "But the pastor says..." I really don't care because what does scripture say?

Let me pull it full circle and we'll close. In verse 13, Jesus makes the statement straight is the gate, narrow is the way. I had a baseball coach that, you know, when you're high school kids, you're a high school kid, I've got three of them, I understand, that when something would take place, whether it was a call at first base, strike three call, whatever it was, as a typical kid, our response would be, "Well, it was close, coach." You know, he had a phrase, "Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades." Actually, a pretty smart statement if you think about it. But what was he saying? "Son, you're fooling yourself. Close doesn't count." Well, when it comes to faith, when it comes to eternity, how many people are going, "Well, it's pretty close"? Jesus said close doesn't count. Narrow is the way of life. Broad is the way of destruction. It wasn't just in Jesus's day, it wasn't just in the '70s, it wasn't just in the '90s, it's even in our world today. Let us test the spirits. Let us contend for the faith because as we see next time we gather, that road may even be more narrow than we think.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Tonight, as we draw this service to a close, you may be that person, we make this appeal each and every time we gather, you may be that person tonight, no matter what your age or your stage of life who somehow, someway has gotten caught up into what you think it means to be a Christian, or what you think it means to be saved, or what you think it means to go to heaven and escape hell but Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. Nobody comes to the Father but by me." Basically, Jesus was saying you don't get to heaven because you get religion, you don't get to heaven because you check off certain boxes on Sunday and Wednesday and maybe another day in between. Basically, Jesus said, "Until you confess your sin problem and call upon me to save you, you'll never be saved." Maybe tonight's the night that you call on Jesus or maybe tonight you say, "You know what, I've been a believer for years," some of you would say, "I've been a believer for decades." Humorously, some of you say, "I even remember when that hymn came out in 1956." But over the course of time, the contending for the faith has become slacking and because of reputation, because of relationships with others, maybe there's voices that you haven't quite inspected as close as you should have. Maybe tonight's one of those nights that as a believer, you depart from here saying, "You know what, if it doesn't line up with 'Thus saith the Lord,' maybe I shouldn't be digesting it and maybe I shouldn't be propagating, promoting it or supporting it." Tonight's one of those nights where we come to this decision, do we do it God's way or do we do it any other way?

Lord Jesus, thank you that even though that road is narrow and even though it is so counter-cultural to our culture today, God, thank you, that you provided the means, you provided the way. We don't have to be, as you call this, sheep without a shepherd. We

don't have to be at the beck and call of that ravenous wolf that we spoke of tonight. God, thank you that you have provided the means, the way, in the life of Christ Jesus. Thank you that we live in a culture and a society where we don't just have a copy of your word, many of us have multiple copies, and God, we confess we often listen to the voices of the false prophets more than even the words on our own pages of scripture. God, today, as we come to this time of decision, may we simply heed what your Holy Spirit has told us, and may we be "doers of your word." It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

If you would stand with me as Bruce leads us, whatever decision, we'll be right here at the front.

"I hear the Savior say,
Thy strength indeed is small.
Child of weakness, watch and pray,
Find in me thine all-in-all.

Jesus paid it all,
All to him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

Lord, now indeed I find
Thy power and thine alone.
Can change the leper's spots,
And melt the heart of stone.

Jesus paid it all,
All to him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow."

As we close tonight, it is my desire, it is my encouragement that we will see you if not Wednesday night, maybe at some point before. May we tonight walk out of here, not just having heard the word of God, but may we leave doing the word of God.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we depart from this place, God, it's kind of our terminology, but you have given us marching orders. Lord, you have commissioned us how to think, how to rationalize, how to realize, and ultimately how to live our lives according to your way, your will, and your word. God, I pray that your Holy Spirit would be so welled up within us that you guide us and you direct us exactly as you would. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

God bless, see you Wednesday, or maybe before.