

Sermon Trinity 8 2020

August 2, 2020

Matthew 7:15-23

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

As a pastor I hear these readings this week and hear a lot of warnings for myself: warnings not to speak a Word as being from the Lord that's not, not to change the doctrines and teachings from what we have in the Word, not to be a hypocrite who sounds good talking about God, about Jesus, but who doesn't actually trust in Him. As Paul said to Timothy: **"Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."** But that's what I need to hear from this. While that applies to pastors, what do we do with this as Christians in general?

As I reflected on that this week I thought of a sort of threefold division to parse this out for Christians. These three parts are: first for all Christians to beware for false teachers; second for all Christians to understand how the tree and fruit imagery that Jesus talks about works; and third that we would all avoid the temptation of being those who are hypocritical, that call upon Jesus' Name but do not do His will.

So first, the words of Jesus: **Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.** Beware of pseudo-prophets. Beware, Christians, of those who say that they are speaking God's Word, but aren't. Wow, this is something there is so much to comment about. It's one that has so many levels. On the one hand, I think we can look very specifically at a context like the Old Testament where you had people calling themselves prophets, who said they had a word directly given to them from God, but who were saying whatever they thought people wanted to hear. Or you had on the flip side of scratching those sorts of itching ears, the Pharisees that would have been in Jesus' hearing. Now to be sure they did the same thing of making it sound like they were speaking God's Word. In fact, they even treated some of their rules as God's own commands. They looked down on those who didn't keep these as though they had sinned. So you have those. Then you have Paul warning against people coming in and changing divine teachings and leading people astray in terms of doctrinal things. So how do we apply this today?

Well, closer to our time, I was reading some on Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, again this week, and was reminded of all of the ways the history of this man reflected a falseness around his teaching. Here he claimed over and over again to speak a

revelation directly from God. In fact, he spoke numerous times claiming that God was giving him the words. He recorded the Book of Mormon claiming that it was the inspired word from our Heavenly Father, despite the contradictions between it and the Bible. Ultimately, the greatest fruit this has borne which shows its wolfly origin is that it speaks not of One God in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but of a Divine Godhood of those three. So not, One God, and One God alone in three persons. Not three persons and one Divine being, but three personages and one Godhood, one rule. With that there is a change who God is, and a change to what faith is. All the more the Book of Mormon teaches that one is saved by grace after all that he can do. No we are saved by grace and grace alone. But Mormons are very nice. In fact, they're very sincere in their niceness and their faith. But that doesn't mean this isn't still problematic.

Or you can see this more closely associated with the Christian church in some of the TV Preachers. You have those who pick dates for the end of time, saying that the Lord gave them those dates. They've been proven wrong. Don't listen to them. They're speaking a word that God didn't give them. They're wolves in sheep's clothing. Or look at someone like Joel Osteen. His message is that God wants you to have your best life now. God wants you to have that promotion or that raise. He wants to give you more wealth. Doesn't that ring with the warning from Jeremiah: **Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.'** This is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Or I think also of those I mentioned a couple of weeks ago when talking about Critical Theory—the worldview that everything boils down to oppressed peoples and oppressing peoples. There are many in the church who have adopted this. Many who would treat Jesus as though He taught this. Now, to be clear, Jesus did speak against oppression, Jesus did speak for justice, but oppression and justice are defined according to him, not according to some of the things we speak of. In particular, if we look at something like the Black Lives Matter movement—and as I say this, I want to make a point that I am not attempting to speak politically here. It may sound like it, but it's really a theological point. The phrase Black Lives Matter has become very politically loaded. I'm not referring to the phrase, here. I'm referring to the wolves in sheep's clothing who have taken hold of the movement associated with the phrase. If you look on their website, one of the things they are seeking to destroy is the nuclear family. This is in direct contrast to what scripture teaches. The very thing earthly speaking that would actually be most

helpful to the black community that is struggling in all the ways they are struggling is to have stable homes with mothers and fathers in them. To take a movement and claim that it's helping a group when it's destroying the greatest help outside of Christ is to be a wolf in sheep's clothing. In fact, I encourage especially those of you parents with kids of school age to make sure to familiarize yourself with this Critical Theory that you can help your kids understand how it is incompatible with the Christian Worldview. So you can teach them how it's a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Having said that, very clear examples of wolves in sheep's clothing, I want to also give some help to when you can know a sheep in sheep's clothing, or even a sheep that might be portrayed as being in wolves' clothing. As I was reading this week about this, there were some good insights. First, was that the most important factor was not viewing worldly success. Just because a teacher has a large following does not equate with truth. Second, it said that this also shouldn't focus per se on a hypocrisy, or a contrast between words and acts. Sometimes right preachers get caught up in sin, sadly. This doesn't excuse it, but it also doesn't negate their message. So it hones in on their message. The fruit to be examined is the message. You see in I Corinthians 14 that right preaching brings upbuilding or edification in the faith, it brings encouragement, it brings consolation. It also brings conviction. As a commentator I read noted, it aligns with the rock of Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It says that Jesus is the son of God, God in the flesh with us, Immanuel. It also teaches that He came to us for what reason? To save us from sin. This means it teaches real sin according to God's Law. It teaches real rescue from that sin by the death of Christ on the cross for your sin, that you would have life in His resurrection. Properly it also tells you that Jesus delivers this life won for you on the cross in His Word, in Baptism, in His Body and Blood in His Holy Supper. This is that whole counsel of God that Paul spoke to the Ephesians. So that's the first part of this: being aware of wolves in sheep's clothing.

Now I've gone on about that portion for a pretty long time, so I'll be a bit briefer for the next two. The second, then is about trees and fruits. Jesus talks about this with regard to teaching, that the teaching of those who say false things shows forth things that are false. A false teacher is going to draw out false belief. However, this illustration of trees and fruits is something I think also helpful for understanding why not all good citizens go to heaven, or why someone can be so sinful, but still convert at the last and enter that eternal life. It's because of the kind of tree we are. You see Paul says it clearly that everything that does not come from faith is sin. Anything that does not flow forth from this faith in this One God in three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, this is sinful. That means no matter how much earthly good it does for an Atheist to feed masses

of the hungry, that is still tainted with the violation of the First Commandment. It's sad, it should grieve us, but that's the reality. It also doesn't make sense according to our eyes, but we live by faith and not by sight. It is in fact that faith that courses through our roots, our trunks, our leaves, our very veins as good trees. In other words, our works as Christians are good in God's eyes, not because we are good in ourselves as people, but because the evil of our sin has been forgiven and because we are made anew in Christ's goodness. We're all born the bad trees, but new life comes from Christ from His blood shed, from His resurrection. We are only good trees in faith in Him. That's the second thing: a good tree is a good tree by faith in Christ.

And to piggy back on that, the third thing, then is to realize that we want to guard ourselves against being bad trees that are really good about looking good and talking about Jesus. As Jesus says, **“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”** This is a warning that we would do the will of God. And what is that? It goes along with the good teaching. It's that we would repent of our sin—we would turn away from that sin, we would restrain it, discipline it, kill it, and that we would trust in Christ for His forgiveness.

Or as I was rereading *Afraid* for our discussion this week, Dr. Bennett makes the point over and over in there that when people are struggling spiritually or attacked demonically, the best place to be is in church. Now I know we're in unusual circumstances that prevent that as it would ordinarily be right now, but heed his point. Avail yourself to the Word of God which gives Jesus' holiness to you. If you don't feel comfortable being in church call me to set up a time to receive Jesus' body and blood. This is our antidote for sin. This is how our Lord crushes that lawlessness in us by which He would turn us away. Positively, this is how He gives us that very faith by which we call upon His Name properly, pray praise, and give thanks. This is in short how we deal with all of this: How we are not hypocritical, how we are good trees, how we avoid those false teachers, those wolves in sheep's clothing.

In fact, in short as we look at these three parts, the wolves in sheep's clothing, the good and bad trees, and those who call upon Jesus' name properly, that's the solution. The Word of Jesus in the Scriptures. The Word that is God's hammer of His Law crushing our sin, and that Word that is life in Jesus' resurrection, giving us new life by His grace and forgiveness. That is our hope in this and in all things. Amen.