

Beware of False Prophets, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 7:15-20

Code: 2254

Let me read again in your hearing the text for our message this morning, as it was the text for our message last Lord's Day, Matthew 7, verses 15 to 20, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth bad fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them." The thrust of the text is found in the first line, "Beware of false prophets."

In our lifetime, recently we have all lived through an incredible tragedy. That tragedy has become known simply for human history as Jonestown. And if anyone ever needed an illustration of a false prophet, Jim Jones certainly provides that illustration; for we can see in him the character, the teaching, the lifestyle, the approach of a false prophet.

In a book that was published last year titled *Deceived* the writer speaks concerning the phenomena of Jonestown. "It will take years to unravel the mystery of Jonestown. There are no statistics gathered about the people who were brainwashed and deceived by the Reverend Jim Jones.

There are no records available to us giving names, addresses, and personality profiles of those who came to The People's Temple Christian Church and stayed to die. The puzzle must be assembled piece by piece from the handful of surviving defectors and relatives of the dead. I asked each of my subjects to describe his religious background, hoping to prove that the converts to Jones' false version of the Christian faith might not have been deceived if they had been exposed to some version of true Christian faith when they were children. I found, however, that they were exposed to Christian truth as children. In fact, in a long interview with Tim Stoen, I got my first answer to my question.

Tim was once the second most powerful man in People's Temple. Tim has a law degree from Stanford University and served as an Assistant District Attorney for San Francisco until he resigned to go to Jonestown in 1977. Tim defected from the cult last year, and worked tirelessly until that awful Saturday in November to get his son, John Victor, age 6, away from Jones and the jungle. According to eyewitness accounts, little John-John was found dead beside Jones' body. 'I was raised in a Christian home,' he told me. 'My parents were fundamentalists, members of The General Association of Regular Baptists, G.A.R.B. I went to Sunday school and college all my young life. I attended

Wheaton College, a leading evangelical Christian college in Illinois, and was involved in student leadership.

When I moved to California, I joined and attended regularly The First Presbyterian Church in Berkeley. For two years I was the president of their Corinthians, a business and professional young adult group. I admired and respected their evangelical yet socially concerned pastoral staff. I was attending First Presbyterian and The People's Temple until I joined Jim Jones staff.' Gene Mills, another victim, was for seven years a member of The Temple, one of Jones' writers, and a member of his planning commission, said, 'I attended or taught in my church's Christian education program from my childhood. When I was 18 years old, I was the leader of the Pathfinders Club, which had over 50 kids in it; I had 22 adults working under me.

I could give you an answer from the Bible for any question. I knew the Bible backward and forward. At one point in my life, the minister tried to send me to college to become his Bible worker, and I was very dedicated to the church.' Wayne Patilla, who was Jones' private bodyguard and driver, grew up in Nazarene Sunday School. His wife and longtime member of the cult grew up in a Charismatic church, and attended Sunday School and church regularly. Bonnie Thielman, for 6 years a member of The Temple, was the daughter of Assembly of God missionaries to Brazil, and attended Bethany College, a Lutheran school in Minnesota. Carolyn Moore was president of her Methodist youth fellowship group, and she and her sister, Annie, were children of a Methodist minister.

And both served as intimate Jones aides, and both died in Guyana." That's a sample out of the first three pages of the book. These people were people raised in a Christian environment, and yet the subtlety of the man deceived even them. Such is the deceitfulness of false prophets, and such is the reason why our Lord says, "Beware." They're not something superficially discovered. The writer of the book *Deceived*, in trying to give us some insight into why it was that people followed Jim Jones, drew the following reasons. "He knew how to inspire hope. He was committed to people in need; he counseled prisoners and juvenile delinquents.

He started a job placement center, he opened rest homes and homes for the retarded, he had a health clinic, he organized a vocational training center, he provided free legal aid, he founded a community center, he preached about God. He even claimed to cast out demons, do miracles, and heal. But on the other hand, we find all the marks of a false prophet. He promoted himself through the use of celebrities, a very common vehicle for false prophets to gain credibility. He manipulated the press, he wanted certain favorable stories, he was big on playing to the press. He pretended to be a Christian. He officiated in a Disciples of Christ church, having been ordained by them in 1964.

He used the language and the forms of faith to gain his power. He used Fundamentalist Pentecostal trappings, and always spoke in Biblical language. He had his people sing and give testimonies as to how he had miraculously healed them." And I might add that they later found out that he was always

supposedly healing cancers, and he would have people cough up cancers and they would display them before the people, and found out that it was bloody parts of chickens that they were using with people who were planted in the congregation. “He created a warm, loving, pseudo Christian community without Christ. He demanded absolute and total loyalty. He replaced Jesus as the authority figure, and went so far as to say that he was Jesus.

He used the Bible, quoting it very often, but perverting it to his own ends. He gave away anointed gifts, miracle blessings, prayer cloths, and always demanded money in return.” Another ploy used by many false prophets. “He was in it for the money. He was utterly, totally consumed with a preoccupation toward sex, and not only sex in a sinful way, but sex in a deviant way. He lied, constantly and continually, about everything.” Such is Jim Jones. And yet in all of that, he was so deceiving that he deceived everybody from Mrs. Jimmy Carter right on down to a thousand people who wound up as corpses in a jungle in Guyana. And he deceived all kinds of people in between, senators, and congressmen, and state assemblymen, and governors, and everybody else who gave him plaques, and honors, and awards as a great civic and religious leader.

If he hadn't died, and Jonestown hadn't happened, the chances are he would have been hailed as a great hero. But it came to a horrible ending. And he gives us the picture of a false prophet that we can see and know about, because of how it ended. Unfortunately, not all false prophets ever become quite so manifest, and so, as Hebrews 5:14 says, “We need to exercise our senses to discern between good and evil.” Because it's not always going to be patently obvious as it became in the case of Jim Jones. He, in his approach, went for the down and outers; there are many false prophets who go for the up and inners, and everybody in between. Now, let me add this footnote on the comments on Jim Jones.

The tragedy of Jonestown is not that nearly a thousand people died. That's not the tragedy, everybody dies anyway. The tragedy is not that they died; the tragedy is that they died and went to hell, thinking they were serving God and on their way to heaven. That's the tragedy. The tragedy is not an untimely death; the tragedy is a timeless eternity. The tragedy of Jim Jones is that he duped people into thinking that he represented God and Christ. And they actually believed they were serving the kingdom of God, only to wake up in hell. Deceit – Satan is a liar and a deceiver, so are his emissaries, and they transform themselves into those who masquerade as angels of light.

Jim Jones isn't the only one, and he isn't the last one. Jesus said, “There shall arise false prophets, and false Christs, with great signs and wonders, who will deceive many.” And Jude wrote that, “There would come these certain men creeping in unawares, turning the grace of God into sensuality.” We've always had them, we'll always have them, he's just an example. And by the way, they're not all going to be exactly like him in their modus operandi, either. He was for the down and outers. Some are for the up and inners. His was a rather blatant and flagrant kind of authoritarianism. Some are much more subtle than that. His was an outwardly vile and filthy approach.

Some are very clean and appear almost virtuous. They come in all kinds of packages. But the heart is always the same – it is the heart of a devil. Now, according to the New Testament, as I shared with you last time, they fall into three categories, do false prophets. First are the heretics. These are the ones who openly defy the truth, of which Paul writes in Titus 3, “They are to be admonished and then put away.” These are the ones who blatantly stand against the truth. And for example, you have a person like Reverend Ike. He says, “The Bible says the love of money is the root of all evil, but I say” – and he says it all the time – “to be without money is the root of all evil.”

He just patently puts himself against the Bible, that’s an heretic. Flagrant, open, doesn’t fool anybody. Then there is a second category, an apostate. An apostate is one who knows the truth, who was reared in the truth, who was around the truth, but in the fullness of its understanding, turned his back on it and rejected it. He too is flagrant. He too is open and against the truth. But then thirdly, there’s another category of false prophet called the deceiver, and this is the one who never comes out against it, who will not accept the fact that he’s an heretic, who will not acknowledge apostasy, but one who deceives. One who is the wolf in the garment of the shepherd; one who “comes in unawares,” as Jude says it.

Subtle – maybe, like Jones at the end, discovered, maybe not. And they stand at the crossroads of life, they stand at the crux of decisions, they stand when humanity is ready to make the choice between the narrow gate, the narrow way that leads to life, the broad gate, the broad way that leads to destruction, and while the Spirit of God woos men to the narrow gate, the false prophets shove them on to the broad way that lead to hell. They come in all levels of sophistication, they come in all kinds of education, in all kinds of garb and dress, with all kinds of ecclesiastical trap-pings, but they are all the same. And our Lord, in referring to them here, certainly had in mind the Pharisees and the scribes.

In Matthew 23, if there’s any doubt by the time we get to that chapter, you’ll know He’s talking about them. But He sees them as false prophets. There they are, with all of their supposed religiosity, there they are, making sure they fill out every minute aspect of the law; they are the religious of the religious, they are utterly beyond imagination in terms of the scruples that they maintain for their religion. If there ever is to be a kingdom of God, they assume that they’ll be at the highest level of that kingdom. They are super-religious, and yet He says to them, “You are false prophets.” Vance Havner had an interesting statement this week. He said, “You can dot all your Is, and cross all your Ts, and still spell the word wrong.”

And that’s exactly what they did. If I can play off of that, you can have all the jots and the tittles, and still not spell Jesus. And that’s exactly what the Pharisees and the scribes were doing; they were very religious, and they were damning men to perdition. So Jesus is saying that in your effort to enter into the narrow gate, verses 13 and 14, in your effort to enter in to the right way, the way to life, beware of

the emissaries of Satan, who will mislead you and deceive you. And they aren't saying, "Hey everybody, let's go to hell." They are not saying that. They tell you it's the way to heaven. Now, there are two words in order to understand this passage that we need to focus on.

One we did last week, and another for this week. The first one is warning. Men and women all over the world are standing at the crossroads of that decision, the false prophets are selling their particular perspective, and we have to preach the truth, and we have to call people to beware of false prophets. That's the warning, beware of them. And I gave you four words. First was a definition: they are false prophets, *prophts*, those who speak forth or speak before. And they who spoke before in the Old Testament, the true prophets, had two things upon which their office was built: a divine commission, and a divine message. They spoke for God, and they spoke from God.

A false prophet has neither a divine commission nor a divine message. He neither speaks for God or from God. He stands in his own authority speaking his own message, and it is utterly false. They are *pseudoprophets*, *pseudochristos*, *pseudadelphos*, false, false, false. That's their definition. And because they're false we need to, secondly, beware of them; that's the danger. We saw definition, and we saw the danger, "Beware." And we told you the word beware means to hold your mind back from – don't expose yourself to them. Here was this fellow attending the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley and at People's Temple at the same time. Raised in a G.A.R.B. background – a Fundamentalist, Bible-believing, Christ-honoring people – but exposing his mind to that instead of holding back his mind.

And he became utterly victimized by the situation. Hold your mind back from that; don't expose your thinking to them. I told you last time how Jude says, if you're going to get those people, you better rescue them in fear, because when you get near that stuff, you get near a false prophet, the subtly of that false prophet can even singe your garment. Let me give you an illustration of this; 2 John, chapter 7 – 2 John, chapter 7. "For many deceivers are entered into the world" – now listen, just stop at that point – there are many deceivers entered into the world. They're everywhere, "and they don't confess Christ in the flesh." And by that, he means the deity of Christ and the work of Christ, both, His person and His work.

In other words, they do not hold a Biblical view of who He is and what He does, all right? What are you going to do with him? Well, first of all, recognize he's "a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves" – take stock, self-examination – "that you lose not the things which you have wrought, but yet receive a full reward." Listen, you could get sucked into that, that deceit, and forfeit the reward that you've already earned by your service to Christ. You're not going to lose your salvation if you're a Christian, but you're going to lose your what? Your reward. Therefore, verse 10, "If anybody like that, who doesn't abide in the doctrine of Christ," verse 9, "comes to you, and he doesn't have that doctrine, receive him not into your house" – why?

Because you do not want your mind exposed to that. “And don’t even bid him godspeed.” And that means have a nice day, fellow, journeying mercies or whatever, whatever. Good luck, happy hunting, whatever – nothing – don’t say a word to him, because if you do, if you’ve bid him godspeed, “you’re a partaker of his evil deed.” The point that John is saying is the guy is so vile, and so wretched, and so antichrist, and so deceitful, don’t you even open your door and let him in there. Now, you can deal with a heretic, and you can even deal with an apostate. It is a deceiver that you cannot deal with, without getting spotted and stained by the filthiness of his own garment. Yeah, but what is your protection?

Second Timothy, chapter 3, has, I think, a good word along this line. In 2 Timothy 3, we are introduced in verse 8 to Jannes and Jambres, the two false prophets in the day of Moses, and just like Jannes and Jambres, “so there are also men who resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.” Now, what do we do with these evil men? Well, we have to recognize them. We have to recognize that they’re going to be judged, verse 9. That they don’t believe what we believe. Paul says, “But you Timothy, have fully known my doctrine, my manner of life, my purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, and patience.” In other words, make sure you make a distinction; you know how different we are.

But verse 13, it’s not going to be easy, because, “evil men and seducers” – these are the false prophets – “will get worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” You see, many of them are even deceived. Someone asked me last week, “Do you think false prophets know they’re false prophets?” Some do, some don’t, because deceivers are often also deceived. And so they continue in the Satanic delusion, and they draw others into it. But how do you protect yourself? Point one, by holding your mind back from them; don’t be exposed to them. But you cannot exist in a vacuum, can you? You’ve got to put something in your mind, what? Verse 14: “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.”

Remember what you learned and the good and godly people you learned it from. “From a child you’ve known the Holy Scriptures, able to make you wise unto salvation.” And, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” and so forth. In other words, give yourself to what was taught to you by good and godly people; give yourself to the Scripture, “which is able to make you perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” “Beware,” hold your mind back from them, fill your mind with the Word of God, and have what Isaiah 26:3 says, “A mind stayed on thee.” What Peter says, “Gird up the loins of your mind” – pull your head together in the things of God, because if you expose yourself to them, they are coming to you in sheep’s clothing.

That’s wool, sheep’s clothing is a wool garment, and a wool garment is what a shepherd wore, and he’s not coming disguised as a sheep, but as a shepherd. He comes in to be a shepherd, and yet he is a wolf who will rip and tear and shred in a ferocious, malicious, devouring manner. “Beware.” So

the definition and the danger, thirdly, the deception, they come in sheep's clothing. You may think you can spot them, but you're going to have to look very carefully; they're not outwardly manifest. It appalls me beloved, that millions of Christian people are sucked in by false prophets, and don't know it – they don't know it. And many Christian leaders lock arms with them in common causes, and they're false prophets, but they're deceitful. The final word is damnation. Their end, we saw last time, as Jude says it in verse 13, is "blackness of darkness forever." And along with the people they deceive, in verse 23 of Matthew 7, the Lord will say, "I never knew you; depart from me, that work iniquity."

So we learned then the warning. Now, the second word for this morning is watching – watching. And I'm going to go through this rapidly; I want you to hear it, because I feel it is an utterly essential message for us in this day of compromise; a day when so many people are parading as Christian leaders, and so many true Christians are linking up with false Christians and false prophets. I think it's essential that we understand this. All right, let's look at the second word. The word is watching. Now that we are warned, what are we looking for? How do I know one when I see one? If I have to beware of them because they're going to tear me up, what am I looking for? What are the marks of a false prophet? Bless God – He doesn't give us an instruction without the tools to deal with it.

He doesn't say, "Watch out for false prophets, and good luck in figuring out who they are." I mean if they are this serious, and this dangerous, then God is going to help us to understand who they are. And so in verse 15, we read this: "Ye shall know – Ye shall know." That is not a command. That is an assurance; that is a confidence. And how are we going to know? "By their" – what – "fruits." Verse 20, "Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them." "Like root like fruit," said the old proverb. The Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, and everybody else views trees and fruit in this same way. A tree is judged by its fruit. If you want to know what the prophet is like, look at what he produces; simple enough, look at what he produces. And you've got to be careful, a little bit careful; you might look at a false prophet and you say, "But I know so-and-so and they go there, and they're Christians. I know they're Christians." Well, that's right. Do you know something? Christians get sucked in by false prophets. Christians line up with false prophets. You know who they are? They're in verse 16. They're the grapes stuck on the thorns and the figs stuck on the thistles. Did you know that grapes don't grow on thorns? And figs don't grow on thistles? But you can stick them there. But if you look closely, you will see that the thorn didn't produce that grape, and the thistle didn't produce that fig. But there are people who will attach themselves, unwittingly; they'll get stuck on some false teacher who appears to be a Christian. But if you look closely, there's a simple principle in verses 17 and 18.

Good trees make good fruit, bad trees make bad fruit. Not too tough, right? You got a bad tree you're going to get bad fruit, no other way; you got bad sap, you got bad stuff in the tree. And the idea isn't a rotten, stinking, wretched-looking tree, with a bunch of crummy, shriveled-up fruit. No, they both look alike – it's just that when you bite into it, one's good and one's bad. You've had that experience. Pick up a piece of – "Boy, that looks good, ho-ho" – one bite, and it is not good. You have been deceived.

That's why the Bible says, "Man looks on the outward appearance; God looks on the heart." So sometimes when you go up there you might see a false prophet, and there's a real grape and a real fig, real fruit.

But it's stuck on a thorn and a thistle, 'cause when you look at the stuff that he produces, it's going to be bad stuff, no matter what it looks like on the outside. Now, how are you going to decide? What are you looking for when you see the fruit? It's easy on looking at an orange or an apple or a banana or something like that, but if you're looking at somebody's life, what do you look for? Well, let me give you four words, again under this second term, watching, that will help you. Number one, fruit is character – fruit is character. What kind of character, what kind of personality, what's his attitude and his motive and his thinking, perspective toward life? What kind of actions, what kind of lifestyle, what kind of pattern?

All that character involves, from what I think to what I do. That's the first element that manifests fruit. You see, the Bible tells us that. When you look in the Bible and you want to find out about fruit, you'll find that fruit is several things. First of all, for our discussion fruit is what we do. It's what we do. For example, Luke 3, verse 8, says this – John the Baptist – "Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance." He says to the scribes and Pharisees, "All right, you say you've repented, you say you've committed yourselves to God, let's see the fruit." Now what is the fruit, what does he want? Verse 10, "The people asked him, What shall we do, then?" I mean what kind of fruit are you looking for, J.B.?

What is it you want? Verse 11, "He answered, and said to them, If you have two coats, give it to one who doesn't have any; if ye have some food, give it to one who doesn't have any. And then a tax collector came to be baptized, and said, Teacher, what do you want us to do? And he said, don't take any more than you're supposed to." In other words he is saying, "The fruit of repentance is giving something to somebody in need, is not taking any more than you deserve; it's an action. Fruit is the way you live, fruit is a lifestyle, fruit is acting. It's not – some people have thought that this fruit here is only in their doctrine. No, no, it's in their action, too; that's clearly fruit throughout the Scripture.

For example, in John 15:8, "In this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit." And what is that? "If you keep my commandments." So fruit is obedience, it's action in response to God. Fruit is not only the action you do, it's the attitude behind it, right? "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control." It's called in Ephesians 5 the fruit of light. And that is, the light of God in your heart produces certain kind of attitudes. In Philippians 1:11 it's called the fruit of righteousness. In Colossians, chapter 1, and verse 10, it says, "being fruitful in every good work." Fruit is both work and attitude. What you feel and think, and what you do.

So what we're saying, then, is – watch this now. The first test of a false prophet is his conduct, his character, as it becomes manifest. And I say that simply because you cannot get true righteousness

from a rotten tree. Check his character, check his lifestyle, because whatever he is in his heart is going to come out. That's why, "They are filth, scabs, spots on your love feast." Peter says, "They have eyes full of an adulteress." They just go around lusting all the time. "They are covetous children, hungry for money." Their whole lifestyle is wretched, they are lascivious, they are lewd, sensual, brute beasts. Now, mark this: they don't always look that way on the outside.

Boy, they can cover that. They can cover it with ecclesiastical robes and trappings, they can cover it with a supposed Christian lifestyle, they can cover it by having a Christian organization that they belong to, they can cover it by hanging around other Christian leaders, they can cover it by talking about the Bible and Jesus Christ and salvation, and they can cover it so many ways. And they can cover it by making sure nobody finds out the truth about their real moral life. A man may appear to be preaching the gospel, he may appear to even be living it, but truthfully, he isn't at all. And maybe sometimes you can't tell on the outside. You can't tell from the action, because the action looks good, like the Pharisees – it looked good, didn't it?

I mean they didn't murder, and they didn't commit adultery, you know. And they didn't do those other things, and it looked really good, and they fasted and they prayed and they gave, and it all looked good. But if you check out the action, do that first, you might find that it isn't all good. I mean if you do some examination of some of the false prophets, you're going to find out there's a lot of skeletons in their moral closet. There's a lot of wretchedness going on. There's a lot of evil greed, and there's a lot of money problems. There's a string of women somewhere, et cetera, et cetera. But maybe you can't find that, where do you go secondly? You go to attitude, and you start looking for how they think, and what's their attitude?

Because very often, they can suppress the outward visibility of their vile and evil insides; their lifestyle may not be manifest. Let me give you an illustration. I think this is a good illustration, 2 Peter, look at it for a minute. In 2 Peter, chapter 1, verse 4, I want you to notice a contrast here. In 2 Peter 1:4, it's talking about true believers – this is powerful. And it says about the true believers that – I just want you to notice down about in the middle of the verse – that "we are partakers of the divine nature." True Christians have received the very nature of God. "We are partakers of the divine nature" – watch this – "having escaped" – watch this word – "the corruption that is in the world through lust."

Now, a true believer has escaped the corruption; that's a deep down word. That's the internal rottenness. We've escaped that; we have escaped corruption. Now, go to 2 Peter 2, verse 19, and here are the false prophets. Now, listen to this: "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of" – what – "corruption." They have not escaped corruption. But watch this one: "they have escaped" - verse 20, what – "pollution." Do you know what Peter is doing? He is differentiating between internal corruption and external pollution. He is saying they've never been changed on the inside, but they've had the ashes of the world washed off the outside. You see, they've gotten rid of the external pollution, but they have never done anything about the internal corruption, see?

That's what he's saying. And there are many false prophets who deal with the pollution on the outside. They get the pollution off, they look really good, temporarily, and how are you going to tell them? I mean you've looked for their action, and they look so good, and you can't find any moral skeletons in their closet, you can't find any problems; outwardly, it all looks kind of nice. Then you start going behind that, behind that covering where the pollution has been washed, and start looking for the corruption, and where do you go? You go to the motive, you go to the inside, the attitude. Now, listen to me – you check them out, people, check them out, not only for your sake, but for the sake of the dear people who are trapped in their evil systems, you check them out.

Unless their motive is genuine desire to glorify God, unless their motive is holiness, unless their motive is to overcome the offensiveness of sin, unless their motive is to magnify Christ, unless their motive is humility and selflessness, then all of their goodness is filthy rags, the menstrual cloths of which Isaiah speaks. In one who appears washed on the outside, the test is the inside. See, Jesus went to the Pharisees and He said, "On the outside, you're whitewashed," right? "You're washed. On the inside, you're full of dead men's bones," see. Now, that's the whole Sermon on the Mount, frankly; that's what Jesus is saying in the whole sermon.

The Pharisees had managed to get the pollution off the outside, and they had to be dealt with on the inside. And you know what to look for in a false prophet? Very simple: look for a Beatitude attitude, that's the evidence of an internal transformation. Do they cower poor in spirit, deep humility, mourning over sin, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, longing for mercy, peacemakers, willing to be persecuted, and reviled, and despised, and hated for the sake of Christ. Not on your life. False prophets are guided by pride, power, prestige, personality, promotion, they want to be famous, loved, they're not interested in anybody persecuting them, they want to be popular.

They're in it, 2 Peter 2:3, "for filthy lucre" – money. "And for that," says Peter, "They make merchandise of you." They are the *Christemporos*, the Christ merchants; they are what 2 Corinthians 2:17 calls the hucksters of the Word of God, who are not sincere, but are selling Jesus, like cheap glass instead of diamonds. They do it for prestige. They are pompous, says Peter. They are presumptuous, self-willed, not even afraid to speak evil of angels, they speak great swelling words of vanity, they come off as egotistic, self-centered, fashion-centered, promotion-centered. Watch them. I don't know how else to say it to you if you can't figure it out now. They are proud, they are jealous of others, they are impure, egotistical, self-indulgent.

And look as long as you will, you'll never find a shred of humility. They're not mourning over their sin, they're not meek before God, they're not seeking the back places, they're not standing, as the beloved apostle Paul, in weakness and fear and in much trembling. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has a good word on this: "A Christian can generally be known by his very appearance. The man who really believes in the holiness of God, and who knows his own sinfulness and the blackness of his own

heart, the man who believes in the judgment of God, and the possibility of hell and torment, the man who really believes that he himself is so vile and helpless that nothing but the coming of the Son of God from heaven to earth and His going to the bitter shame and agony and cruelty of the cross could ever save him and reconcile him to God.

That man is going to show all of that in his personality. He is a man who is bound to give the impression of meekness, he is bound to be humble, and our Lord reminds us here that if a man is not humble, we are to be wary of him. He can put on a kind of sheep's clothing but that is not true humility, that is not true meekness. If a man's doctrine is wrong, it will generally show itself at this point. He will be affable and pleasant, he will appeal to the natural man, and to the things that are physical and carnal, but he will never give the impression of being a man who is seeing himself as a hell bound sinner being saved by the grace of God alone." End quote.

You know what I've found? That false prophets attract the unbelievers just as much as the believers. They appeal to carnality and the natural man. They look good, but you look good, and if you don't know by the outside, then look for humility. Because Jesus said, in John 7:18, "You can know that I'm the Son of God because I seek not mine own, but I seek the things the Father gave Me to do." If Jesus set that as the standard for His own identity, certainly that test should be given to any man. John Calvin said, "Nothing is more difficult to counterfeit than virtue." You'll find the truth if you look.

Secondly, the second area of the fruit of the false prophet is their creed; not only their character but their creed.

And this refers to their actual teaching. Their teaching will go wrong. Look at it closely. Not only will their teaching go wrong at some points, they'll teach wrongly, but secondly, watch this one, here's the subtle one – they'll leave out certain things. They'll teach wrong things, some of them, and some of them will just leave out certain things, and what they say sounds good, because it's what they don't say that's really the issue. In Matthew, chapter 12, and verse 33, it says, "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or else the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit." Same little symbol. Then 34, "O generation of vipers" – you snakes, he says – "how can you, being evil, speak good things?"

"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. And by your words you'll be justified, and by your words you'll be condemned." So listen to what they're really saying; listen to what they're really saying. Do they speak the Bible? Do they give the whole counsel of God, from the beginning to the end? Do they withhold nothing? Discharging their duty so that, as Paul said, "I am free from the blood of all men; For I have not failed to declare unto you the whole counsel of God?" Isaiah 8:20 says here's the test: "Look to the law and to the testimony;" that's this Book. "if they speak not according to this word, it is because there's no light in them." You show me a man who does not teach from the Word of God, or who teaches error from the Word of God, and I'll show you a false

prophet.

And sometimes they talk about the Bible, they just don't talk out of it. They cannot expose their life to the light of the Word. If a man doesn't teach what the Scripture teaches, then he's a false prophet. And you listen not only to what they say and compare it with Scripture, but what they don't say. Now, what sound doctrine does our Lord particularly have in mind? Go back to Matthew 7, and I'm going to show you the thrust of this and wrap it up. What is the issue here? Listen to me. You can always tell a false prophet because they have a twisted view of Christ, all right? That is His person and His what? His work. And what is His work? Salvation. So when you get into dealing with a false prophet you want to look at their doctrine of salvation. This is where it all gets mixed up.

Now, the Lord has just said this. To be saved is not easy, right? You go through a what? Narrow gate, to a narrow way, "few there be that find it." And you must what? Strive, agonize, to enter in. Let me tell you something about the doctrine of salvation of a false prophet. It isn't going to teach that kind of salvation. It's going to be a great, big, wide, broad doctrine that includes everybody, and they say, "All you have to do is believe in Jesus," and they may talk about that He died and He rose again, and they may give you what sounds like the gospel, but when it comes to who gets in, it's everybody. Arthur Pink said, "False prophets are to be found in the circles of the most orthodox, and they pretend to have a fervent love for souls, yet they fatally delude multitudes concerning the way of salvation.

"The pulpit, platform and pamphlet hucksters" – and I'm sure he would have added radio and TV if held lived today – "have so wantonly lowered the standard of divine holiness and so adulterated the gospel in order to make it palatable to the carnal mind." End quote. They have a cheap doctrine of salvation. Sign a card, walk an aisle, stick a hand up, love Jesus, and you're in. Doesn't matter what your life is; everybody's included. So I would say point number one in their doctrine is there is no narrow gate – there's no narrow gate. Their creed has no narrow gate. And the lie, beloved, is in what they don't say, you see? He says nothing offensive. They want to please everybody.

Their message is comfortable and comforting and happy, and they will be praised by liberals and evangelicals. And there's no offense in the cross. Oh, they may present Christ as the way, the truth, the life, but it's not a narrow gate. Their message is a message of easy salvation; come down the aisle, get baptized, whatever. Their message is the message of health, happiness, positive thinking, easy salvation. They are the compromisers. Jeremiah pinned it in chapter 6 and chapter 8. Listen to what he says. "They have" – I love this word – "slightly healed the hurt of the daughter of my people." Here come the false prophets, and the daughter of My people has a deep wound.

And they put a little Band-Aid on it and say, "We fixed it all up." Don't even see that wound, it's not even there; we just covered it over. And Jeremiah says, "They say, Peace, peace; when there" – what – "is no peace." In other words, they lie. They say everything is fine, and it isn't. There's no repentance, there's no warning, there's no judgment, there's no brokenness, there's no contrite heart,

there's no deep sorrow over sin. It's a comforting, positive, lovey-dovey message, and Jeremiah says, "My people love to have it so." They don't want to know the truth anyway. Why do you think people in our society get blasted all the time on drugs and booze? They don't want to know the truth about anything.

Why do you think they sit with their faces in front of that tube? So they can watch fantasy; they don't want reality. Why do they go to movies? They don't want reality. They love the illusion. And so the false prophets have a very, very big field to harvest from. "My people love to have it so." And so they pile up, the people do, behind the happy Holy Spirit healers, and positive thinkers, and cheap grace preachers, in one great, big, comfortable group, saying, "Peace, peace." And there's no peace. That's not the way. I believe Martyn Lloyd-Jones was exactly right when he said, "Inevitably" – listen to this – "false prophets are characterized by an almost entire absence of doctrine."

It's just not there; you never hear them talk about it. They don't want to talk doctrine, they don't want to talk theology, we just all get together. They never particularize anything. Everything's very vague, and very foggy, and very ethereal; no message of holiness, no message of obedience, righteousness, justice, judgment; it's just a lot of happy feelings, health, happiness, positive thinking thoughts, easy-believism, get saved, jump on the bandwagon, and it pleases men into hell. There's never a call for repentance. This is a far cry from the Puritans, a far cry from John Wesley, George Whitefield and others. Do you know when John Bunyan was saved – he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Holy War*, and other things – that great man of God wrote sort of a biography called *Grace Abounding*.

And in that, do you know what he says? He says, "I endured at the time of my salvation an agony of repentance that lasted eighteen months." Eighteen months he agonized over his sin. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "Repentance means you realize you're guilty; a vile sinner in the presence of God. That you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you're hell bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, and you long to get rid of it, and you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world is in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself and take up the cross and go after Christ.

Your nearest and dearest in the whole world may call you a fool or say you have religious mania. You may have to suffer financially, but it makes no difference; that is repentance." End quote. The false prophets don't preach it that way. They're vague about everything. We better listen to the true prophets and not the false. Arthur Pink says, "Certain it is, my reader, that any preacher who rejects God's law, who denies repentance to be a condition of salvation, who assures the giddy and godless that they are loved by God, who declares that saving faith is nothing more than an act of the will which every person has the power to perform, is a false prophet, and should be shunned like a deadly plague."

How do you know them? By their fruits. What are their fruits? Character and creed. Thirdly, and just a comment, converts. You can tell them by who's following. You want to know about a leader, look at his followers, look at their lives. "Many shall follow their sensual ways," said Peter. Their fruit is their converts. That's right, look who's following them, see who's buying their bag, accepting their influence. Who has bought their cunning craftiness? Paul calls his converts, in Romans 1, fruit, and converts are fruit. Do you see humility in their lives, do you see a striving after holiness, do you see a hungering and thirsting for righteousness? Or are they just the bandwagon gang, just on the bandwagon.

Jesus, sort of a trip they're on. Do you see real virtue, real godliness? There's a fourth term, you can tell them by the fourth fruit, consummation. You can tell them by how they're going to end, too. Verse 19, "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Ultimately, you can tell a false prophet by his condemnation, his consummation. And I want to close with the truth here that I want you to get. Listen, God has ordained that false prophets exist. Have you ever thought about why? I did, till I understood a principle in Scripture. Just listen to this, write it down, 1 Corinthians 11:19, you can study it on your own, just jot it down, 1 Corinthians 11:19.

It will really help you to understand this. Here's what it says – now just listen to me. "For there must also be heresies among you" – did you hear that? There must be heresies among you. You say, "Well, what do you mean? Why couldn't the Lord leave them out? Why do we have to have this trouble of false prophets? The Lord didn't have to let them happen." But "here must be there heresy." Why? "In order that they which are *dokimos*, approved, may be made manifest." You see, God says if you have a heresy, then that heresy becomes a magnet that pulls away the false disciples and leaves manifest the genuine ones. It's like the wind that blows the chaff away, you see?

In other words, He is saying they will have converts who will identify with them. Error separates the chaff and the wheat. By means of true and false prophets, God reveals who's genuine. Oh, I know some of the genuine fruit's over there stuck on those thorns, and some of the tares are sown among the wheat. But generally speaking, false prophets are ordained of God to become the attractors or the magnets that draw the ungodly to themselves, and in so doing, they damn them. It's a part of God's judgment. In 2 Thessalonians 2:11, listen to this. "For God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie." God actually allows the delusion to happen; why?

"In order that they all might be judged who believe not." God wants that delusion, because it becomes the point of attachment for those who reject Jesus Christ, and it obviously separates them from the wheat. And so they're ordained for judgment. So be warned, beloved, and be watching. Many of these false prophets are going to look like the real thing, they're going to be very pleasant, very sincere people, talk about Jesus, talk about the Bible, talk about salvation, completely inoffensive, anxious to please everybody, accommodating to other people's viewpoints, rarely critical of others, praised by many, condemned by few. Large crowds will gather around them and listen to them and

think they're great, and they'll be shoving those large crowds on the broad way that leads to destruction.

You listen carefully you'll find they have little time for narrowness. They are just sure that God's mind is bigger than many of those who talk about a narrow way. They talk about the love of God and not the wrath of God, they talk about people being deprived and not being depraved, talk about God, the Father of everybody, full of love and understanding, and nothing about a holy God, whose only children are those of faith in Christ. Their message is a message of gaps, that just leaves out the truth that saves. So "Beware." I close with Acts, the warning of Paul to the Ephesian elders. He said this. "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock."

I know that. If this were the last Sunday I were ever to preach at Grace Church, I think I'd preach this message. I know that after my leaving, grievous wolves will enter in among you, false prophets. "And of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples to themselves. Therefore, watch, and remember, that for the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears." There's those two words, watch and warn, watch and warn, you watch and you're warned, Paul says. They're going to be there, they're going to be right in the midst of us. "And now, brethren," here's the answer: "I" – get this – "commend you to the word of His grace" – our only protection. Let's pray.

Father, thank You again this morning for Your good word to us, for the patience of these people, to hear and listen with real hearing hearts. Confirm in us that which is from You, help us to be discerning that we may not fall prey to those who would damn men's souls. And yet, Lord, we know that there's a sovereignty about it all, too; we don't understand how that comes together, but we know You've ordained them for such a judgment, to draw to themselves the chaff, that the wheat might be made manifest. Show us the true and the false, so that we might point men to the narrow way. For Christ's glory we pray. Amen.

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