

# The Sermon on the Mount

## "Watch Out For Wolves!" (Matthew 7:15-20)

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. At almost any hour of the day or night you can turn your TV to any one of a half-dozen religious networks (such as the Trinity Broadcasting Network, Daystar, or the Inspiration Network) and hear men and women who claim to be speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
  - A. These so-called modern-day prophets claim that they are declaring the Word of God, and often begin their testimony with the words, “God told me...”
    1. Probably the most outrageous claim of a so-called modern-day prophet is Oral Roberts who told his nationwide audience in 1987 that God had threatened to “call him home,” as he put it, if he didn’t raise \$8 million dollars by a specific date to keep his multi-million dollar Tulsa-based City of Faith medical and research center operating.
      - a. Despite the fact that Roberts raised the money, he was still forced to close the debt-ridden medical center two years later.

- b. When asked why he closed the center after raising the \$8 million dollars, Roberts said God told him it was okay because He only wanted Roberts to draw attention to God's power to heal.
  - c. And so, Roberts wants us to believe that the millions upon millions of dollars he persuaded his followers to give to a failed hospital and medical center was not in vain – God wanted the facility to be built to simply draw attention to His power to heal.
2. Kenneth Copeland, who heads one of the most popular Charismatic Pentecostal ministries today, made this claim during the Voice of Victory Campaign in Dallas, Texas about a revelation he supposedly received directly from Jesus Christ.
- a. Copeland claims Jesus said: “They crucified me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim that I was God; I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was in me.”
  - b. This outrageous statement has Jesus denying His own deity – denying that He is God in the flesh. Nothing could be further from the truth.

- c. And yet, the followers of this so-called modern-day prophet swallowed that lie believing it to be true because they believe God speaks through Kenneth Copeland.
- B. Many people like to think you can trust religious leaders. In fact, those in the ministry usually rank high in polls among believers as someone you can trust.
1. After all, these people have been entrusted with preaching and teaching the Word of God, right?
  2. They aren't driven by personal greed or personal ambition – they're truthful and trustworthy, correct?
  3. Sadly, there are many in the ministry today who are outright charlatans and frauds – who are INTENTIONALLY deceiving millions in the name of Jesus Christ for their own personal gain.
  4. And then there are those who are simply misinformed – who believe they are teaching the truth of God's word, when in fact, they are grossly misrepresenting the truth.
- C. In fact, the Scriptures are FILLED with warning after warning about false prophets and false teachers.
1. The apostle Peter warned: **2 Peter 2:1-3** – *But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive*

*heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.*

2. Jude, the brother of James (and also the brother of Jesus) wrote:  
**Jude 3-4** – *Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.*
3. The apostle Paul even warned the elders from the church at Ephesus: **Acts 20:28-31** – *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse*

*things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*

4. And even Jesus gave a similar warning to His disciples in The Sermon on the Mount: **Matthew 7:15-20** – *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them."*

- D. These false teachers and false prophets will be difficult to detect, in many cases, because:
  1. They do their work SECRETLY, behind-the-scenes, deceiving people who are either gullible or untaught.
  2. They creep in unnoticed and spread their poisonous doctrine.
  3. They will appear to be teaching the truth when in fact their purpose is to draw away disciples to their own false beliefs.

4. They appear as harmless as sheep, but inwardly are ravenous wolves who have only one agenda – to gather followers who will accept their false teachings and their heretical doctrines.
- II. I've often said it takes only ONE UNTAUGHT GENERATION for the church to fall away COMPLETELY into apostasy.
- A. And don't think for a moment that all the false prophets and false teachers are out THERE somewhere in the denominational world.
    1. The Scriptures warn us that they are AMONG us – they are within the body of Christ (within the Lord's church).
    2. That's why the apostle Paul was so specific about warning first century Christians that, *"from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves..." (Acts 20:30)*
  - B. But the reason for their success in spreading their false teaching and heretical doctrines is basically two-fold:
    1. One reason for their success is because we don't know what to look for.
      - a. We look at someone and think they're a really nice person, really friendly when, in fact, they could be very subtly

displaying the character traits common among all false teachers.

- b. Therefore, we need to be looking at their FRUIT – not only at their lives, but at their teaching and how that teaching either transforms or compromises the lives of those who hear and follow their teaching.
2. But perhaps the greatest reason for their success is the Spiritual and Biblical ignorance of Christians who will either swallow everything they hear, or who lack the courage to challenge false teaching when they hear it.
    - a. The apostle Paul told Christians in the first century:  
**Ephesians 4:14-15** – *"...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ..."*
    - b. A gospel preacher who played a major role in mentoring me when I first began preaching put it bluntly when he said, "Never underestimate the IGNORANCE of brethren."
    - c. It's sad, but true. Far too many in the body of Christ today are *"tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of*

*doctrine*" because they are just plain IGNORANT of the Scriptures.

- d. They couldn't spot false teaching if it came up and shook hands with them.

C. Therefore, in the time we have remaining this morning I want us to look at the problem of false teachers and false teaching, and suggest some things we can do to not only spot false teachers but to protect ourselves from their teaching.

1. Jesus warned His disciples to beware of false prophets or false teachers.
2. Are you concerned about false teachers? You should be!
  - a. The great diversity of teachings in the religious world today, and even among our own brethren, suggests that many are being misled.
  - b. We need to be reminded of the danger false teachers pose, and know how to spot any "wolves" that might come our way!
3. Therefore, with the words of Jesus from The Sermon on the Mount fresh on our mind, I want to use this opportunity to remind us to "Watch Out For Wolves!"

**BODY:**

- I. The FACT that there are false teachers among God's people today is a given – no one disputes that. So how can we identify them and guard ourselves against them?
  - A. The good news is that Jesus said we CAN spot them. We can identify them by their FRUITS. But what does that really mean?
    1. Albert Barnes in his commentary on The Sermon on the Mount puts it best: *People do not judge a tree by its leaves, or bark, or flowers, but by the fruit which it bears. The flowers may be beautiful and fragrant, the foliage thick and green; but these are merely ornamental. It is the "fruit" that is of chief service to man; and he forms his opinion of the nature and value of the tree by that fruit.*
    2. It seems Jesus is not so much talking about the TEACHING of the false teacher as He is about the LIFE of the false teacher.
      - a. The Lord indicates that sooner or later we will begin to see the REAL CHARACTER and the REAL MOTIVES of the false teacher slowly emerge.
      - b. Initially, he will be like any other tree. But in time the fruit of the tree begins to appear.

- c. That's when the false teacher's hidden motives or hidden agenda gradually becomes apparent.
  3. The apostle Paul warned about this very thing when writing to the church at Corinth and warning the disciples there about those who come into their midst posing as good, holy and righteous teachers or ministers – as ambassadors for Christ.
    - a. **2 Corinthians 11:13-15** – *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*
    - b. Outwardly, Paul warned, these men will appear righteous, but in the end their works of deceit, deception and dishonesty will come to the surface and it will become apparent just how UN-righteous they have been all along.
    - c. Their righteous appearance will be nothing more than a sham to disguise their real purpose to gain control by gaining followers.
4. Listen again as Jude, the brother of James (and the Lord's brother) describes these wolves in sheep's clothing.

- a. **Jude 16-19** – *These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. 17 *But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: 18 how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. 19 These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.**

B. This is why it's IMPERITIVE to TEST EVERYONE who would occupy the pulpit, or a classroom, to make CERTAIN they things they teach are in harmony with the Word of God.

1. John urged saints of the first century to do this very thing.
  - a. **1 John 4:1** – *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*
2. And remember the warning the apostle Paul gave the elders of the church at Ephesus that from among their own members false teachers would arise seeking to draw away disciples after themselves? That actually happened. About 30 years later the Lord, speaking through John, said this to the church at Ephesus:

- a. **Revelation 2:2** – *"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars..."*
3. And the apostle Paul warned Timothy that he needed to be on the lookout for these false teachers who will try to infiltrate the church, and to always remain faithful to the divinely inspired Word of God and the ONLY standard of truth.
  - a. **2 Timothy 3:13-4:5** – *But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 4:1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready*

*in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

- II. Now that we understand this threat is REAL – even in our OWN day and time – and now that we understand the need to examine the FRUITS of ANYONE who would assume a teaching or preaching role within the church, what is it that we need to be looking for?
  - A. Let's look at some of the INDICATORS that should sound the alarm of a possible false teacher in our midst?
    - 1. First, they work secretly – covertly, underground – by meeting privately with person after person to build a base of followers before they bring their false teachings to the surface.
      - a. Peter warned, **2 Peter 2:1** – *But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false*

*teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...*

- b. Paul encountered these kinds of false teachers himself whom he describes as: "...false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage)..."

**(Galatians 2:4)**

- c. So the first danger signal should be someone who doesn't want their teachings or their beliefs to be examined in the light of the open assembly – in a public setting, where their teachings can be put to the test.
- d. Rather, they often cowardly resort to bringing in their beliefs or their teachings by stealth (being sneaky, devious and deceitful) and meeting secretly to build a support base of followers before they bring their false doctrines and teachings to the surface.
- e. We should ALWAYS encourage an open and frank discussion of differences – bringing opposing views into the open to be discussed and tested against the TRUTH of the Scriptures.

- f. First century Christians did this over the hotly debated issue concerning circumcision of Gentile converts (**Acts 11**), and in the way Paul and Silas openly proclaimed Jesus before Jews in Berea (**Acts 17:11**) who listened with open minds, then went home to search the Scriptures to see if the things Paul and Silas were preaching conformed with the Word of God.
  - g. Therefore, watch out for wolves who operate covertly in an attempt to gather followers.
2. Second, false teachers are often motivated by greed and covetousness to gain a position of power or influence, or simply for monetary gain.
- a. The apostle Paul warned Titus of these kinds of men: **Titus 1:10-11** – *...there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.*
  - b. Paul also warned the Thessalonians that some false teachers appear to be congenial and cooperative on the outside, even resorting to flattery to cover up their real motives.

- c. Paul was concerned that none one would think this of him:

**1 Thessalonians 2:3-6** – *For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. 4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness — God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.*

- d. Jude also warned that false teachers often resort to flattery:

**Jude 16** – *These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.*

- e. This is why Paul chose to financially support himself in preaching the gospel: **1 Thessalonians 2:9** – *For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.*

- f. Paul told the Corinthians that one of the marks of false teachers is that they are simply preaching for financial gain

(preaching for profit): **2 Corinthians 2:17** – *For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.*

- g. Even though those who preach the Word have every right to be financially supported in that work, Paul chose otherwise so no one could charge him with preaching for financial gain:

**1 Corinthians 9:14-18** – *Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. 15 But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. 16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.*

- h. So, watch out for wolves who are motivated by greed and covetousness and who will resort to flattery to mask their real

agenda of seeking power or influence, or who simply peddle the Word for financial gain.

3. Third, false teachers are notorious for twisting and perverting the Word.

a. Sometimes they intentionally twist and pervert the Word. It was happening among the churches of Galatia: **Galatians 1:6-9** – *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.*

b. Peter also warned about those who intentionally pervert the Scriptures: **2 Peter 2:3** – *By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.*

c. But then Peter also warned that there are those who are so ignorant of the Word that they become false teachers by

misapplying Scripture: **2 Peter 3:14-16** – *Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; 15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation — as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*

- d. The apostle Paul described these same false teachers by saying they are: "...*desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.*" (1 Timothy 1:7)
- e. For what may simply be selfish reasons, they cast aside the warning of James: **James 3:1** – *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*
- f. So, watch out for wolves who are notorious for twisting and perverting the Word – either deliberately, or simply because they just don't understand the things they are teaching.

- B. There are so many other characteristic marks or identifiers of false teachers we could mention, but time doesn't permit.
  - 1. However, the important thing you need to remember is that false teachers can't hide their motives for long – sooner or later they reveal themselves for what they really are.
    - a. In time, the true character of most false prophets will be exposed by the fruit of their life!
  - 2. So rather than judging motives or attempting to judge the hearts of those who claim to speak for God, all we need to do is be "fruit-inspectors"
    - a. The fruit of their life and teaching will become apparent soon enough.
    - b. This is how we can "Watch Out For Wolves!"

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. Being able to identify false teachers and false teaching presumes one very important thing.
  - A. It presumes that our knowledge of God's word is sufficient enough to be able to identify false teaching when we hear it.
    - 1. However, this isn't always the case.

- a. Too often, brethren are still *tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men.*

**(Ephesians 4:14)**

2. The sad truth is that many in the Lord's church today are no different than the people of Israel in Hosea's day when God said:  
*"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..." (Hosea 4:6)*

- B. It's sad when you think that God's people CAN BE destroyed by false teaching and false prophets and teachers.

1. But it's equally sad to know that God's people can ALSO be destroyed by indifference toward sin to the point that it affects THEIR OWN lives.

- a. And yet, that's one harsh reality we have to face every day – being constantly on guard against the enemy who would rob us of eternal life by turning us away from the Lord.

2. And it's ALSO sad to know that people who are SO CLOSE to giving their lives to the Lord somehow never take that final step and remain in a lost condition forever.

- a. The enemy is also robbing them of eternal life by convincing them there's no need to make a commitment at this time.

- C. So, let me ask this question.

1. Is the enemy robbing you of eternal life?

- a. If you're a Christian and yet living a life inconsistent with the life of Christ, then the enemy is robbing you.
- b. If you've never obeyed the gospel of Christ – coming to Christ in complete obedience – then the enemy is robbing you as well.