**Week 37**

Matthew 7:15-20

Beware of False Prophets

**RECAP**

As we have been walking through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been showing us that true righteousness is not about outward appearances, like the Pharisees displayed, but about a heart transformed by God’s truth. He warned us not to judge others with hypocrisy, but to examine our own hearts first so that we can walk in humility and discernment. He then encouraged us to ask, seek, and knock to come to our Father with persistence, trusting that He will give us wisdom and strength to walk faithfully. Jesus also reminded us that the way of discipleship is not easy. The narrow road that leads to life is often complicated and costly, but it is the only road worth walking. Now, as we move into today’s teaching, Jesus warns us of a danger that lies along this narrow path: false prophets. These are those who claim to speak for God but lead people away from Him. They may look convincing on the outside, but Jesus tells us we can know them by their fruit, because just as a tree is known by the kind of fruit it bears, so a person’s life and teaching will reveal whether it is rooted in truth or deception.

**READ: Matthew 7:15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”**

False prophets have always been an issue for God’s people. They are agents of Satan to lure God’s people away from truth and into error that ultimately leads to the destruction of their lives. Jesus is placing this part of His message right after the warning that most people, even those who believe they are “Followers of Christ,” are on the broad road to destruction.

Who is leading the many astray? False prophets/teachers. They are much like the Pharisees, who had sold out to their prideful positions, power, money, and the worship of men. The Pharisees put their traditions above God’s word and taught the people that this was the way to God. The people blindly followed them and found themselves far from the plan God had laid out for them in the scriptures.

What makes them so incredibly dangerous is that they mingle in the same community with believers, passing themselves off as scholars, workman, pastors, fellow heirs of Christ. They use the same language, attend the same functions, wear the same clothes, and perform many of the same religious acts: communion, baptism, tithing, etc. But inwardly, they are wolves deceiving the people.

**READ: Jeremiah 23:16** Thus says the Lord of hosts: “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.

**READ: 2 Corinthians 11:13-15** For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

**READ: 2 Peter 2:1** But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

**READ: 1 Timothy 4:1-2** Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared

**READ: Jude 12-13** These are hidden reefsat your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

**There are many titles given to us as a warning of those who corrupt His truth and lead His people astray!**

They are called **false prophets** (Matt. 7:15; 24:11, 24), **false teachers** (2 Pet. 2:1), **false apostles** (2 Cor. 11:13), and **false brothers** (Gal. 2:4; 2 Cor. 11:26). Jesus also warned of **false Christ’s** (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22) and likened them to **wolves in sheep’s clothing** **ravenous wolves** who slip in among the flock (Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29). Paul and Peter describe them as **servants of Satan** and **deceitful workmen** (2 Cor. 11:13, 15), spreading **destructive heresies** (2 Pet. 2:1; Titus 3:10). John calls them **antichrists** (1 John 2:18, 22; 2 John 1:7), while Revelation identifies them with **Satan’s synagogue** (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). They are further described as **children of the devil** (Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:10), **enemies of the cross of Christ** (Phil. 3:18), and **spots and blemishes** among the church (2 Pet. 2:13). Jude paints them vividly as **hidden reefs**, **waterless clouds**, **fruitless trees**, **wild waves of the sea**, and **wandering stars** destined for judgment (Jude 1:12–13; 2 Pet. 2:17). Paul warns of them as **dogs** (Phil. 3:2; Rev. 22:15), and Jude calls them **grumblers, malcontents, boasters, flatterers** (Jude 1:16), and above all, **ungodly people who pervert the grace of God** (Jude 1:4).

These names remind us of their danger; they disguise themselves as part of God’s people, but their true nature is revealed by their deception, corruption, and destruction.

**Wolves**

When Jesus warns us about wolves, He is not only exposing the danger of false teachers but also reminding us how vulnerable we become if we are not living according to God's design.

Wolves hunt sheep because sheep are defenseless on their own. Sheep don’t have claws or sharp teeth, and they easily scatter in fear. A wolf rarely charges head-on into a flock; instead, it waits for a sheep to wander away, separated from the shepherd and the other sheep. That isolated one becomes easy prey. Spiritually, the same is true for us. Believers who are not grounded in God’s Word, who neglect prayer, or who pull away from the fellowship of other believers become far more vulnerable to deception.

God did not design us to live as **“Lone Ranger”** Christians. From the very beginning, His people were a covenant community, a family of faith. Jesus calls us His flock, not His **“individual”** pets.

The New Testament shows that we are to labor together in the Word, encourage one another, and hold one another accountable. When we study the Bible together, we sharpen each other’s discernment. When we pray together, we strengthen each other’s faith. When we gather in fellowship, we remind one another of the truth and guard against wandering.

This is why **Hebrews 10:24-25** urges us not to neglect meeting together, but to stir one another up to love and good works. The more we walk closely with Christ and His people, the harder it is for wolves to deceive us.

When we isolate ourselves, we become easy targets. A believer who drifts from Scripture, avoids accountability, or chooses independence over community is like a sheep that strays from the flock. Such a person is vulnerable to two dangers:

1. Being led astray by their own heart, which Scripture tells us is **“deceitful above all things”**
2. Being lured into a full-out attack by **“wolves”,** false teachers, and spiritual deceivers who are eager to devour. **Deception thrives in isolation, but truth is reinforced in community.**

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calls us not only to Himself but also into His flock. We are safest when we remain close to His voice in the Word, strengthened by prayer, and surrounded by the body of Christ. Wolves cannot be avoided, they will always try to creep in, but sheep that stick together under the care of the Shepherd are far less likely to be torn apart. God’s design is clear: we need His Word, we need prayer, and we need one another. That is how we stand firm in the face of wolves.

**OPEN DISCUSSION**

**How To Spot the False Teachers**

**READ: Matthew 7:16-20 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits.**

Jesus is taking us straight to the fields and vineyards. Grapes and figs were a picture of blessing and daily life in Israel. Grapes were pressed for wine, and figs were eaten fresh or dried for strength. These were good, nourishing fruits. However, thornbushes and thistles were the opposite; they were useless, prickly, and a curse on the land, often choking out what was fruitful.

Everyone in Jesus’ audience knew you would never expect a cluster of grapes hanging from a thornbush or figs sprouting among thistles. His point was harsh but straightforward: what grows out of something reveals what it truly is.

Jesus applies this truth to spiritual leaders and teachers. Just as a healthy tree naturally produces good fruit, and a diseased tree can only produce bad fruit, so the reality of a person’s heart, doctrine, and life will show in the results.

A tree can look alive for a season, but eventually its fruit or lack of it exposes the truth. In the same way, someone may appear spiritual, speak eloquently, and even perform impressive works, but over time, the **“fruit”** of their **character,** their **teaching**, **lifestyle,** and the lives of those who follow them will reveal whether they are rooted in Christ or deception.

This matters for us today because Jesus is not just talking about teachers back then; He is talking about how we discern truth now. In our time, there are plenty of voices claiming to speak for God, but the test is not how polished they are, how large their following is, or how persuasive their words sound. The test is their fruit.

**How to Test the Fruit**

In an age of social media platforms, celebrity preachers, and highly produced sermons, it is more difficult than ever to discern whether someone is a true or false teacher. Many leaders today have polished speeches, massive followings, impressive credentials, and plenty of charisma, but those things are not the measure of truth. Jesus warns us to look deeper, beyond appearances, to the fruit. To do that, here are several tests drawn from Scripture that can help us discern whether a teacher is trustworthy or dangerous.

**Ask Questions**

**Christology:** Who do they say Jesus is? A true teacher confesses that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. If they deny His deity, reduce Him to a created being, or make Him **“a way”** instead of ***the ONLY******Way*,** or they teach Jesus became God after His resurrection but was not God on earth, they are a false teacher. **(John 1:1, 14; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:3)**

**The Trinity:** A denial of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as coequal, coeternal God. If they teach modalism, one-ness Pentecostalism, Jesus is the Father, they are a false teacher. **(Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14)**

**What is the Gospel:** Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. If they add works, rituals, tongues, baptism, or law-keeping as necessary for salvation, they preach **“another Gospel.”** What do they teach about sin? If they minimize sin, redefine it, or say repentance is optional, they are giving another Gospel. If they deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, the virgin birth, and atonement on the cross, they have another gospel. **(Luke 24:47; 2 Cor. 7:10 Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 1:6-9).**

**Scripture:** Do they teach that the Bible is the final, sufficient authority for faith and life? Red flags include adding **“new** **revelations”** that contradict Scripture, claiming secret knowledge, or elevating traditions and human teachings above God’s Word. Teaching that the Bible is flawed or needs added books such as Enoch, Maccabees, Gnostic Gospels, Book of Mormon, Organizations like Watchtower, or Catholic Catechism. We are to add nothing to God’s written word. **(Mark 7:7-9, 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Ps. 19:7-11)**

**Character:** Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits.” Look for humility, holiness, love for the flock, and willingness to suffer for truth. Warning signs include greed, love of money, manipulation, sexual immorality, arrogance, and seeking their own glory. Look for the fruit of Galatians 5. **(3 John 9, 1 Timothy 6:5, 1 Pet. 5:2-3, Galatians 5:19-23)**

**Church Relationship:** Do they build up the body of Christ or cause division? Do they encourage submission to Christ as Head of the Church, or do they try to draw disciples after themselves? Can they be corrected, or is there religious abuse when authority is questioned? Do they wash the feet of the flock, tending to the souls with compassion and care? Do they adhere to God’s biblical design of male and female roles? Do they stand with the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman? Do they stand for the sanctity of life at any age? **(Acts 20:30, Eph. 4:11-13, Rom. 16:17, Col. 1:18, Titus 2)**

**SUMMARY**

In summary, to test teachers, examine their doctrine, what they teach about Christ, salvation, and Scripture, and their life and fruit, what kind of character and influence they have. A good test for fruit inspection of false teachers is to look at the Sermon on the Mount. This is what Jesus has been doing: taking the word to examine the Pharisees who had led God’s people away. Today, we need to do the same. **We have become captivated by emotional, entertaining, eloquent speaking that creates an experience rather than God’s word washing over us in truth and transformation, which leads to holy living and love towards our fellow man.**

The Bereans didn’t take Paul’s word for it, and neither should we. **Test your teachers, including Amy and me.** The landscape tells us that we have more false teachers than true teachers now. One in four “Christians” deny that Jesus is God, and less than 6% have a biblical worldview. More people are denying the trinity, bringing back law keeping, believing we must use Jesus’s Hebrew name for Him to respond to us, worship on Saturday only. The list is honestly endless, so please remember, the deception will be so great that even the elect can be deceived if possible. These false teachers will have lying signs and wonders and an appearance of righteousness; they are smooth talkers and have enticing speech.

The greatest weapon against the false teachers is knowing the Word for ourselves, studying it properly in context, learning church history, always asking, seeking, knocking for wisdom and discernment, being actively plugged in, and submitting to a body of believers who teach truth, staying closely connected to the Good Shepherd and His people! **We must become good fruit inspectors, or we will be deceived. As the serpent asked Eve, “Did God really say?” Please do not fall for it today, saints!**

**Homework**

1. Go back through and read all the scriptures in parentheses. Take this teaching seriously, go back over last week's teaching on the narrow path. We are living in “the great deception” and “the great falling away”. God desires no man to perish!
2. Meet someone new for coffee these next two weeks or have someone new over to your home. They met daily, house to house, breaking bread, laboring over the Apostle's teachings (the scripture).

**Outreaches**

**August 25th**, Stephen will be back up at Akron University Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9am-10:30am. Friday, we set up a booth and music, 11 am – 1 pm (or until tracks and snacks run out). Talk to Stephen if you want to be a part of this ministry.

**September 6th** Annual Harvest Festival at the Hartville Flea Market. See Katie for details on how you can help serve. All hands on deck. This is CCC’s biggest outreach of the year!

**Contact Stephen if you ever want to go for a walk and pass out tracts and talk with people about Jesus. Akron, Canton, or Cleveland.**

**ADDED Teaching from Discussion**

**Last night, several important points were raised about false teachings. One of them was the reminder that we are not to constantly go around hunting for false teachers with a critical spirit. That is true; however, God’s Word clearly commands us to test every spirit (1 John 4:1). This means we must examine the message of every person who comes into our midst not with suspicion or negativity, but with discernment rooted in Scripture.**

**Another point was about loving false teachers as image-bearers. Yes and amen Jesus tells us to love our enemies, to pray for them, and to long for their repentance. At the same time, God has given us very clear instructions on how to deal with false prophets, teachers, apostles, and their teachings. We cannot ignore or tolerate what God has explicitly warned against. With that in mind, we want to look again at what Scripture says, especially in light of Matthew 7:15-20.**

**Stephen and I take very seriously the teaching of God’s Word and the differences in understanding that may arise among us. This morning, we took extra time to dig deeper into Scripture with these two points in mind. Our Friday teachings could always go deeper and wider, but we try to highlight the most essential truths. It seems Stephen may not have gone quite deep enough last night, and a few questions were left open. For that reason, we want to bring more clarity.**

**We are grateful for the open discussions and for the thoughtful questions that help us press further into God’s Word. Our prayer is that these instructions from Scripture will strengthen us all with discernment and help us navigate these critical issues faithfully. This teaching is not to produce fear as fear is not from God but rather to sharpen our discernment. We do not fear false teachers or teachings we have the Holy Spirit 1 John 2.**

**1. Recognize Them Clearly**

Jesus warns, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15). The first step is awareness. They look like us, sound like us, and move among us, but their fruit reveals their nature (Matt. 7:16-20). Paul says this in Acts 20:29-30, warning that even from among the elders of the church, wolves would arise. God’s people are never to be naïve we are to stay alert and discerning.

**2. Test All Things by Scripture**

The Bereans are our example as we brought up last nigth: “They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). John commands: **“Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1).** Scripture is the measuring rod. If a teacher denies Christ’s deity, twists the gospel, or promotes sin, we don’t excuse it we reject it (Gal. 1:8–9).

**3. Separate From Them**

Paul commands, “Watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). Titus 3:10 says, “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him.” The instruction is not to engage in endless dialogue, debate, or provide platforms to false teachers. Once exposed, they are to be avoided. Leaders/Teachers who have positions have often already been warned of their false teachings; however, if you encounter a teacher that is clearly teaching falsely, prayerfully go to them one on one and bring correction; if they repent, praise Jesus, but if they refuse, separate from them and warn the flock of God.

**4. Expose Them, Don’t Endorse Them**

Ephesians 5:11 commands**: “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”** Jude 1:3-4 calls believers to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” because “certain people have crept in unnoticed.” **To remain silent or passive is disobedience; we are to shine light on error for the protection of the flock.**

**5. Do Not Tolerate Them in the Church**

2 John 1:10–11 is very strong: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.” **This does not mean we can’t be kind in a general sense**, but it means we do not welcome or platform them as teachers within the church. To support them is to share in their error. This is so important that we test those who influence the flock. Just because they say “Jesus” does not mean they are in “Christ”.

**6. Guard the Flock From Them**

Shepherds are charged to protect God’s people. Paul told Titus to “rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13). Elders are required to “hold firm to the trustworthy word so that they may be able to instruct in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). Protecting the sheep sometimes requires public correction of wolves.

**7. Love, But Do Not Excuse**

Yes, Jesus commands us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44). That includes false teachers, we should desire their repentance, as God desires all to come to the truth (2 Tim. 2:25-26). Paul himself was a blasphemer and persecutor until Christ intervened (1 Tim. 1:13-16). But Scripture never allows us to excuse or tolerate false teaching in the name of “love.” Love for Christ and His flock means confronting lies with truth. Jesus loved the Pharisees and the people enough to expose publicly their hypocrisy and warn the flock about them. The Sermon on the Mount has been an open rebuke to the false teachers of that day. Love doesn’t equal tolerance; true love often offends. (1 Corinthians 13:6, Matt. 15:12-14, Galatians 4:16)

So from Genesis to Revelation, God’s command is consistent: **recognize false teachers, test their teaching, separate from them, expose them, refuse to tolerate them, guard the church against them, and at the same time pray for their repentance.** We must not confuse biblical love with tolerance of error. Love for God and His people requires decisive action. As Jude says, “Have mercy on those who doubt; **save others by snatching them out** **of the fire**; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh” (Jude 1:22-23). We pray this helps in dealing with the false teachings and teachers of today and the works of those in the past. Be good Bereans and search everything out for yourself. Test every spirit and do not confuse the modern politically correct, ecumenical, love equals tolerance spirit that has overtaken much of Christianity. Souls are at stake, eternity is forever, and boldness is necessary in these last days. We love every one of you so much! Iron sharpens Iron. We are grateful to be with a beautiful body who loves God and loves people as much as we do!!!!!