

## BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS

**Psalm 19:11** says “Moreover by **them** [“them,” here, is referring to God’s Word] is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.” This, to me, is a wonderful verse! God gives us **two reasons** we should be **thankful for**—and be **students of**—the Bible. What are the two reasons?

1) Because God **warns us** through His Word! **Why** does God warn us? Because **He loves us** and wants to keep us from that which will harm us! What’s the **second reason** we should want to know what God says?

2) Because **in keeping God’s Word**—in obeying it—**there is reward**. What **kind** of reward? **Great** reward!

Do we **believe** these two things? Do we **live like** we believe them?

Last week, we focused on an OT warning found in **Numbers 32:23** where God through Moses gives us this **timeless truth**: “Be sure your sin will find you out!” **An OT example** of sin that was hidden—but later found out—was that of **Joseph’s brothers**. What had they done? They sold Joseph, tore up his coat of many colors, sprinkled it with blood, and brought it back to their father, asking him if the coat belonged to Joseph or not!

They then **hypocritically tried to “comfort”** their father regarding Joseph’s death and lived with the guilt of what they had done for 15 years! But **God’s Word is true**—and **God is true to His Word**—so sure enough, their sin “found them out.” There was a happy ending, though, because Joseph was **forgiving**—and had a strong belief in the **goodness** and **providence of God**—even after being sold by his brothers and ending up in jail for a crime he didn’t commit! Joseph’s attitude was: “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Gen 50:20).

We also looked at an **example in the NT**—that of Ananias and Sapphira—found in Acts 5. Their sin was hid for only minutes, though—not years! Let’s not forget that their sin was **not** in **keeping part** of the proceeds of the land they had sold for themselves; it was **lying about** how much they received and pretending they had **given all of it** to the church! Speaking of which, **where’s the money** you were supposed to bring me from selling your houses or land this past week 😊?

This morning, we are going to look at another **warning** the Bible gives us—this time from the NT. It is a warning that **Jesus Himself** gave but was repeated by Peter...and Paul...and Jude...and John. What is the warning? It is found in Matthew 7:15-20; please follow along as I read those verses. The warning, of course, is in verse 15 “Beware of false prophets...”

First, let’s consider... **1. The declaration concerning false prophets**

Notice again the 1<sup>st</sup> phrase of vs 15: “Beware of false prophets...” 3 truths contained in these 4 simple words.

### A. False prophets are real

How do we know **there is such a thing** as false prophets? Because Jesus says to “Beware” of them!

Whereas **unbelievers** might think Jesus would **say things just to say** them, **believers** know that Jesus would not cry “wolf”—unless there is such a thing **as a wolf!** Here are some similar warnings given by other NT writers about the need to **beware** of false prophets.

In Paul’s farewell address to the elders of the church in Ephesus he said in **Acts 20:29-30** “For I know this, that after my departing **shall grievous wolves enter in among you**, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”

**II Peter 2:1** “But there were **false prophets** also among the people, even as there shall be **false teachers among you**, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”

**Jude 4** “For **there are certain men crept in unawares**, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**I John 4:1** “Beloved, **believe not** every spirit, but **try the spirits whether they are of God**: because **many false prophets** are gone out into the world.”

Mark it down; Jesus said **beware of false prophets** because there are false prophets!

Not only are false prophets real, B. False prophets are a real threat

Maybe I'm being a bit redundant, but Jesus wouldn't warn us about something that *wasn't real*—and He wouldn't warn us to “beware” of something *unless it was harmful*! “Beware” here comes from the Greek word *pros-ehk'-o* and means the same thing we think of when we hear the word “beware”—to “be careful; be on guard against something that will harm us.” We'll touch more on their destructive nature in a little bit.

Not only are false prophets a *real threat*, we dare not miss the fact that...

### C. False prophets are a real threat to us!

We understand the difference, right? *Hurricanes* are a real threat during hurricane season—but are not a threat *to us* here in WI! *Avalanches* are a real threat in the mountains—but they are not a threat here!

False prophets, on the other hand, *are* a threat *to us*! Even though Jesus' words here in Mt 7:15 were to a particular group of people at a particular time, they still apply *to us today*. How do we know?

Acts 20:29 “...after my departing shall grievous wolves **enter in among you...**” Paul spoke this to people who lived *after Jesus* had died and gone to heaven. Near the *end of Paul's life*, he repeated the same warning in II Tim 3:13 “But evil men and **seducers** shall wax worse and worse, **deceiving**, and being deceived.”

Peter, *after Paul's death*, wrote in II Peter 2:1 “...even as there shall be false teachers **among you...**” More importantly than all of these repetitions, though, is the fact that when Jesus was teaching on end times, He said in Mt 24:11 “And many **false prophets** shall rise, and shall **deceive many.**”

In other words, false prophets...false teachers...deceivers...will characterize the end times and can come in *among us*—*even in our small church*—here and now! That is why Jesus warns us to beware of them!

Next, let's consider... **2. The deceptive nature of false prophets**

Notice again our text, vs 15 “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing...”

Let's think through the picture Jesus is painting—and the warning that He is giving us.

--Is Jesus saying that sheep wear special clothing? No; sheep don't wear clothes—other than their wool!

--Is Jesus saying that a *false prophet* will wear *literal wool*, then, like a sheep does?

No; *that's not* what Jesus is saying either! They'd be pretty easy to spot if that is what they wore!

--What is Jesus saying? Jesus is saying that false prophets *pretend to be something* they are not!

--What do they pretend to be? They pretend to be *sheep*—when in reality they are *wolves*!

But we're not talking about *literal* sheep or *literal* wolves, are we? Why did Jesus use *sheep and wolves* imagery instead of something like chickens and foxes? At least two reasons:

1) The listeners to whom Jesus was talking to were very *familiar with sheep*—and the fact that *wolves* were their most common natural enemy! More relevant than that, however, is...

2) Because the sheep *represent us*—God's people!

Although being “sheeple” is not something we are particularly fond of being called in the *political* arena, God refers to His people *as sheep* in both the Old and New Testaments.

Psalms 100:3 plainly states “...we are His people and the **sheep** of His pasture.”

In the NT, Jesus Himself *calls us* “sheep” on a number of occasions, particularly in John 10!

John 10:11 “I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for **the sheep.**”

John 10:27 “**My sheep** hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:”

The point, then, is that false prophets will come to God's people, be *among us*, and *pretend to be* one of us! They may *dress* like God's people...and *talk* like God's people...and *go to church* with God's people. They actually blend in quite well. In fact, they may even *study the Bible* and want to *teach* the Bible, but inwardly they are not what they are *pretending* to be. Instead of *being* one of God's people, they are really out *to destroy* God's people! Why do I say that? Because Jesus calls them “ravens wolves!”

They are not merely the “black sheep” *in the family* like some of us are in our families. Jesus says they are *destroyers* and *devourers* and *dividers* of God's family!

Let's consider, then, ... **3. The destructive nature of false prophets**

### A. Called “ravening wolves”

What is a **ravening** wolf? The word that Jesus uses for “ravening” is quite interesting. It comes from a Greek word that means “seizing; a sudden snatching like in a robbery.” It’s only used 4 other times in the NT—Luke 18:11; I Cor 5:10; I Cor 5:11; and I Cor 6:10—and is translated “extortioner” in each of the 4 other times. An extortioner is someone who **obtains things from others by force**, intimidation, or undue power.

The picture, then, is that a false prophet tries to **snatch for themselves** God’s children. **What kind of sheep** does a **literal** wolf go after? The young...the sick...the weak...ones that are physically separated from the rest of the flock. False prophets aren’t much different. They go after those that **are young in the faith**...those that are a still wobbly on their legs...those that are not **well grounded** in God’s Word.

What else can we learn about their destructive nature?

### B. Called “grievous wolves”

Let’s turn now to Acts 20, beginning with verse 28. As mentioned earlier, Paul is writing to the leaders of the church in Ephesus. We see that in verse 17. What does Paul tell the elders—the pastors—of this church?

--To take heed to **themselves**—in other words, they need to guard their hearts

--And to take heed **to the flock**—meaning look out for the welfare of the church and protect it

--And **feed** the church of God—meaning to teach them the Word of God—and how to **feed themselves** from the Word of God

--Vs 29 “For I know this, that after my departing shall **grievous wolves** enter in among you, not sparing the flock.” What is the difference between a “grievous” wolf and a “ravening” wolf?

Whereas a **ravening** wolf is one who snatches or seizes suddenly, **grievous** pertains to how they do it. One Greek lexicon has “cruel, fierce, and savage;” another defines it as “cruel, unsparing, and violent.” Without getting overly graphic, I believe most of us at one time or another have seen a documentary...or movie...or video where a **pack of wolves** has surrounded and attacked some kind of animal. It is not pretty by any means and words like “cruel, fierce, savage, and violent” describe the scene quite accurately.

We can understand **how a wolf** can be “cruel” or “violent” **to a sheep**, but how can a **false prophet** be cruel to an unsuspecting **person**? There’s obviously no **physical struggle** where blood is shed and where death may occur, so how does the description apply?

--Is it **cruel** to tell someone that you “know” God will heal them—and that they must just be lacking faith if they aren’t healed? Yes, it is because sometimes God chooses not to heal!

--Is it **cruel** to tell people if they are **not financially rich** that they are doing something wrong, and that God is not pleased with them? Yes, it is because God nowhere promises **physical riches** here on earth!

--Is it **cruel** to coerce people to **give sacrificially** so a so-called “preacher” can live extravagantly? It sure is! Remember me telling you **about Jesse Duplantis**, a prosperity preacher from New Orleans who told his followers that he had a message for them **straight from Jesus**. What was the message? ‘Jesse, I want you to **bleed me** for a Falcon 7X.’ In other words, Jesse was to tell his followers that **Jesus said** they were to provide the monies for “their preacher” to buy a 54 million-dollar-jet! This **new jet** was supposedly a **need**—even though he already had 3 **other** jets!

**How destructive** are false prophets? Along with being called **ravening** wolves and **grievous** wolves, we also see a... C. Callousness toward the flock

How much **do wolves** care about the sheep? Depends how you define “care,” right? You could argue that wolves absolutely “love” sheep—but only to eat them, of course!

What about **false prophets**—whom Paul calls “grievous wolves?” What is their attitude toward the flock? They don’t care about it at all! In fact, in the end of verse 29 it says, “not sparing the flock.” Let’s not hurry past this. **Whose** flock is it? Look at the middle of verse 28. It is “the church **of God**” that God—in the person of Jesus—purchased with His own blood!

But a false prophet doesn’t care that it’s **God’s church**—and that **Jesus paid** for it! They don’t want it spared—they want it **destroyed!** They don’t care that the **Holy Spirit** is the One who makes **the Pastor** the overseer of the flock like it plainly says here.

In fact, we see in verse 30 that false prophets want to... D. Create converts to themselves

Verse 30 “Also of your own selves shall men”—I do not believe this **excludes women**—“arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”

#### i. Their plan

False prophets usually don't want to **wreck the church just to wreck the church!** **They want converts**; they want **disciples**; they want **followers**. I don't believe anyone can honestly read this verse—and prayerfully think it through—and conclude that it is God's will for them to come into a church with the intention of drawing away disciples **to themselves, for themselves!**

**None of us** should want disciples to follow after us—with one caveat! It is okay for you to **follow me**—but only so far as I follow Christ! Aren't you being arrogant, Pastor? No; I'm being Biblical because that's what Paul told the Corinthians in **I Cor 11:1** “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”

But **when** I fail you—I'm human, so **I will** (if I haven't already)—Christ **will not** fail you, so keep **following Him!**

Listen carefully: I have no plans of going anywhere so don't read into this at all. I plan on dying here—hopefully not at church on a Sunday morning, but here in Necedah 😊! But if God **were to move me** for some reason—and I came **back to visit** a year after I left—this is what I would hope to find: **everyone** of you still here. Why? Because that would mean you are **following Christ** and not me!

The same goes for when **I'm gone** on a Sunday. Don't play hooky because I'm not here! God's people will still be here if I happen to be gone—and God's Word will be preached—so you need to be here, too!

So that's **the plan** of the false prophet—to draw away disciples after themselves. **How** do they do it? We have that here, too! I'm calling it... **ii. Their process**

What is their process? What method do they use? How do they go about trying to draw disciples after them? Verse 30 “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking **perverse things...**”

What are **perverse** things? Oftentimes when we hear the word “perversion,” we think of **immoral** and **unnatural** physical acts. You adults know what I'm referring to. But “perverse” here refers to what they are doing with **doctrine**. They are corrupting it...and distorting it...and misinterpreting it...and twisting it.

**Barnes** put it like this: “Crooked, perverted, distracting doctrines.... They would proclaim doctrines tending to distract and divide the church.”

Commenting on the same phrase, **Poole wrote**: “...perverting Scripture; establishing their false doctrines by Scripture, which they wrest [distort in meaning] to their purpose.”

We'll talk more about the **descriptions** of false prophets next week, but this is obviously one of their chief characteristics: they corrupt...and distort...and misinterpret...and twist **true** doctrine, so that it becomes **false** doctrine. If they didn't **twist** true doctrine, it would **remain** true—and not be false doctrine! But to be a **false** prophet, they have to promote **false** doctrine! And false doctrine is really only one of two things:

It is either: 1) Totally “made up” with no Scriptural support whatsoever;

OR 2) Twisting Scripture to mean—and say—something God did not intend it to mean!

Which is more likely to deceive someone: making something up “out of thin air”—or twisting the truth?

Rhetorical question, isn't it? Twisting the truth will be more effective in deceiving than making it up!

As bad as **these** particular false prophets are, though, they aren't the **worst** kind. Why do I say that? Because if they are attacking **God's sheep**—those who truly **belong to God** because the Good Shepherd died in their place—a false prophet can't pluck them out of their Father's hand!

The **worst** false prophets, then, are the ones who corrupt...and distort...and twist the truth about how to **become a sheep** in the first place! They preach a false **gospel**; a false way to obtain forgiveness of sins. They preach baptism...and catechism...and church joining...and communion...and golden-rule keeping...and money giving. In other words, they preach **works!** But **works don't work**—and God made that perfectly clear! **Eph 2:8b-9** “It is the gift of God, **not of works**, lest any man should boast.”

**Titus 3:5** “**Not by works** of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us,”

**Romans 3:28** “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith **without the deeds of the law.**”

Beware of false prophets! Why? Because Jesus told us to! I need to warn you to protect you as an individual and our church as a whole, but you need to do your part in staying away from them!

So what does God want you to do with what you heard this morning?

1. First, make sure you are indeed one of God's sheep! What are you counting on to get to heaven?

**Works**—the message of false prophets;

OR **Grace**—the message of the cross! The Good Shepherd **came as a Lamb** to die on the cross so that you could be forgiven.

Have you transferred your trust to Jesus and what He did—or are you counting on you!

2. Second, **beware** of false prophets! Don't think you can't be a target—and don't think our church can't be a target.

3. Be discerning—and listen to the Holy Spirit! We'll talk more about this in the coming weeks, but if you hear something that causes "red flags" in your mind, don't ignore the warning!

4. Be in the Word of God. The best defense against error is knowing the truth!