

Matthew 7:15-20

A Tale of Two Trees

Introduction

- Many dangers to church / believers
- Outside - persecution, temptations, cares-riches, love grow cold
- Inside - pride, division, power, heresy, false conversion
- One supreme danger → False teachers / prophets
- Prophet in the OT was man w/ God's message - spoke for God.
- Avg. person → had no Bible, no commands, needed a messenger
- God warned of false prophets - **Turn to Deut 13:1-13 - Read**
- God knew would happen, he ordained it & used it to test his people. **Read 3**
- Not a lot of people actually "Let's go after other gods."
- Straying from faithfulness often starts as slow erosion:
- Don't talk about sin, excuse sin, defend sin
- "We don't need to keep *that* command" / "that's legalism" / "that's not a sin" / "Does the Bible really mean that" - it can't mean that.
- It started with questioning the Word - "Did God really say?"
- And ends in outright rebellion to the truth and God.
- Did you notice how that kind of rebellion was to be purged? Death.
- NT → uses this passage to affirm church discipline in excommunication. **1 Cor 5**
- This rebellion is to be put down no matter who it is: friend / mother / brother / son / daughter / wife.
- It will often be those closest to us, all the more be ready.
- Obviously, we don't put people to death for false teaching in the NC.
- But we don't tolerate it within the church even among those in our own family.
- Q: Who is our allegiance to? It can't be both God and our false prophet daughter / father.
- Our ultimate allegiance has to be to the Lord God.
- **Matt 4:10:** You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' - no divided allegiance.
- **Luke 14:26:** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.
- Hating = hyperbole, but msg is that Jesus is first and foremost always and by a huge margin.
- If choice is b/n faithfulness to Jesus or following your husband who is enticing you to sin, you go with Jesus.
- This is where rubber meets road.
- Sometimes the issue with false teaching is bad doctrine: deny the Trinity / deny salv. by grace alone thru faith alone / deny resurrection.
- That's what I think most of us think of when we hear false teaching - and there are people spreading false doctrine which denies the gospel.
- But we need to understand false teaching is not simply wrong doctrine.
- More often the issue with false teachers is they entice us into sin.
- **Turn to 2 Peter 2:1-22. Read**
- Notice: didn't deny the Scripture / deny deity of Jesus / not polytheistic
- What did they do?
- Sensuality / greed / exploited people \$\$ / homosexuality / lust of defiling passion / speak confidently about the angels when they know nothing / revel in the day time (openly) / adultery / greed / boastful / slaves of corruption
- We do need to be on guard for theological error within the church.
- But the error the NT seems to emphasize is moral error; putting up with sin; applauding sin.
- **Titus 1:16:** They profess to know God, but deny him by their works.
- **Turn to Matt 7:15-20** → issue thru Matt 7 is people who say they follow Jesus but secretly love sin.

Context:

- Only 1 command here: beware / watch out (NIV)
- BDAG: Be in a state of alert for impending danger:
- **Luke 21:34:** Beware that our hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness.
- **Matt 10:17:** Beware of unbelieving men who will hand us over to courts.

- **Luke 20:46:** Beware of false prophets - scribes - who like the outward trappings of religion.
- Here → to all disciples beware.
- Not just pastors, mature, immature. I could be a false teacher!
- ψευδοπροφητῶν → they look exactly like true believers, maybe even mature believers, at least for a time.
- Need to understand: false prophets don't always stand up front, aren't great speakers, or even well-educated and want to talk about bad theology.
- False prophet could be the average looking person in the pew next to you → what makes them false is they want to entice you into sin.

1) Danger of false prophets. Read 15

- Some know: WA state has a problem with wolves.
- Problem: people think they are endangered / good / "need to save the wolves."
- Wolves are neither good or endangered.
- True problem is they are devastating and prolific - kill dozens of sheep in a night and move on to the next farm.
- Prey in secrecy with pack tactics, identifying the most opportune time to pounce and attack the most vulnerable when least expected.
- "Ravenous" - "rapacious" → live on / exist on killing sheep; they thrive on going from one fold to another annihilating all who are there.
- Ravenous / rapacious isn't so much the way they fight - wolves overpower sheep easily.
- Ravenous is more their way of life.
- This is their sole means of life, they go from one flock to another devastating everyone in their wake.
- This is what false prophets do: go from one church to another devastating all in their wake.
- They love division and controversy.
- I had a false teacher contact me 5 months ago - wanted to come to RBC.
- Couldn't be nicer, very kind - but he denies the future resurrection of believers and the future return of Jesus.
- The Bible says those that do this functionally deny that Jesus rose again from the dead - the future resurrection is no joke.
- Turns out this guy has a habit of going from church to church sowing division, seeking disciples, trying to lead people astray.
- He is a wolf in sheep's clothing - outwardly you'd think he was fine.
- They thrive on this tactic, say they hate "drama" all the while devouring sheep in the fury.
- They want to respect leadership, all the while undermining them.
- They love truth, all the while sowing lies.
- They seek to destroy the sheep for whom Jesus laid his life down for.
- Some say: "I'm not vulnerable" - yes you are.
- Q: Are you a sheep? Then you can be attacked and Jesus is talking to you.
- Jesus gives no exceptions/exemptions → all sheep/followers are to beware of wolves.
- Problem: Don't know who they are until too late.
- They lurk around for a while - long while - watching, waiting, becoming your friends, learning your vulnerability, often for years - then the slaughter comes.
- **Acts 20: 29:** I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.
- Even elders of church miss wolves at least for a season.
- BTW: When a wolf is discovered, it's ugly for everyone.
- Imagine shepherding a flock of sheep when you pull out a .308 Win Mag and blow away a sheep in the middle of the flock.
- Only it's not a sheep, it's a wolf.
- All the sheep freak out b/c they think it's just a sheep you've destroyed - many don't know what's going on.
- But it's required to destroy wolves → everyone is required to destroy them, not just elders.
- Wolves are the sinful trojan horses of churches.
- They look and act and smell like sheep but are just waiting to pounce.

2) How to recognize false prophets. Read 15-18

- Here Jesus switches metaphors from wolves to trees.

- The tree metaphor dominates the rest of the section - why do this?
- B/c wolves give us the danger imagery but by using fruit trees Jesus helps us identify these people.
- Jesus is speaking to an agricultural society
- One difference between fruit trees and harvest crops is that fruit takes much longer to grow.
- We harvest wheat in July; harvest fruit crops in the fall.
- Fruit trees sprout leaves in April or May, start flowering and pollinating in the summer, but it takes a long time to get to the fruit.
- I think that's idea: It could be a long, long time before you realize you have a diseased tree with bad fruit.
- I had a pear tree for 3 years
- Moved in in June, harvested in September, October - golf ball sized rocks of pears.
- Next 2 years the fruit got a little better but it was never edible, always nasty.
- But you had to be around the tree a long time to detect it's badness - and you couldn't make it good.
- Now: what are we looking for here? What kind of fruit sets a false prophet apart?
- **Turn Gal. 5:16-24.**
- Sometimes false prophets are undetected for a long time, and do many good things.
- Here: it comes out. **Read 16-21**
- Their deeds will eventually come out - they can't not come out.
- Don't know about rivalries until church meeting, sorcery until they have a drug problem, orgies until their spouse sees their browsing history on the internet / envy until you sit in their seat one Sunday morning.
- Fruit of Spirit **Read 22-24**
- You usually won't be able to notice these kind of things in a short period of time - it takes more time to manifest, but it will manifest.
- The fruit of the Spirit manifests in the midst of trial and difficulty and pushback.
- Most people are nice when not tested, but are they filled with fruit when the going gets rough?
- Turn to **Matt. 7.**
- Something we need to understand: false prophets will eventually manifest themselves - they have to.
- Jesus: only 2 types of trees - good/bad, regenerate/unregenerate, saved/not saved, wheat/tares.
- And the contrast Jesus makes is precise: It's edible fruit with inedible fruit.
- It's something that sustains life and something that would eventually kill you.
- Either the fruit of your life - the love, joy, peace, patience, so on - is growing and causing life in others.
- Or the fruit of your life is thorns.
- Imagine you kid comes to you and says they're hungry and you're like "Here kid, eat these goat heads for dinner. You can have a side of cactus when you're done."
- That would kill the kid - the fruit that false prophets bear kills those around them.
- And even though they might produce morality for a while, they might genuinely look good on the outside.
- But their fruit will eventually be made known.
- It has to be made known - everyone's fruit is eventually known.
- So we recognize false prophets by their lives usually more than their doctrine.
- But eventually their fruit will be known.

3) The destination of false prophets. Read 19

- Sunday school question for you: Where do false prophets end up? Hell.
- They are cut down and thrown into the fire.
- This is the same thing John the Baptist said back in **3:7-10. Read**
- Here John is warning people they can't rely on their Jewishness to get them to heaven.
- No one can rely on their parents/upbringing/prayer of confession to save them.
- Ultimately the only thing that confirms salv. is bearing fruit in keeping with repentance over the long haul.
- If there is no fruit, the only thing that they can look forward to is burning.
- "Man, Jason, you're talking a lot about hell lately" - last week, this week.
- Actually Jesus keeps talking about hell: last week destruction, this week burning.
- The next section is about him sending false converts away from him at the judgement.
- Where do you think they are sent to? Hell.
- Jesus wants people to be perfectly clear about what's on the line.
- These false prophets are not our brothers, they are not our friends.
- They are our friends like wolves are friends with sheep.

- So here's the call to you, to everyone:
- Beware. There will be false prophets among us - there will be people outwardly look great but inwardly are a moral train wreck and will try to entice you into their sin and destroy the flock.
- And it's easy to make excuses for them.
- We like them / give benefit of the doubt / "don't want to be legalistic" / they just need more time
- Division rises up and if we're not careful we're justifying their sin left and right
- No - Jesus says beware - high alert.
- Watch the fruit in people's lives.
- We don't coddle wolves, we get rid of them; for the good of our church and for the glory of God.

Pray