

Sermon on the Mount, Part 10: Don't Be Deceived!

For parts 1 through 9 of this series, see “Sermon on the Mount, Part 1: The Beatitudes”; “Sermon on the Mount, Part 2: Salt and Light”; “Sermon on the Mount Part 3: Dealing with Anger”; “Sermon on the Mount, Part 4: Love Your Enemies”; “Sermon on the Mount, Part 5: Quit Being a Showoff!”; “Sermon on the Mount, Part 6: Store Your Treasures in Heaven”; “Sermon on the Mount, Part 7: Stop Worrying”; “Sermon on the Mount, Part 8: Examine Yourself”; and “Sermon on the Mount, Part 9: Ask, Seek, Knock – God’s Framework for Prayer” on the Bible Studies page at www.ChooseJesusToday.com.

We are living in the last days. One only needs to read the newspaper or listen to the evening news on television to see Bible prophecy being fulfilled before our very eyes. Satan knows his time is short and he is hard at work deceiving people into believing his lies and neglecting their salvation. Satan uses charlatans and false prophets to do his work. Satan also deludes Christians into believing they are living for Christ when, in fact, they are not. We must not fall prey to Satan’s trickery, delusions, and deception. Jesus knows Satan’s tactics and has given us the tools to be overcomers. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us how to recognize false prophets and how to be honest in our assessment of ourselves as Christians.

False Prophets

The term “false prophets” is generally used to describe false teachers, preachers, leaders, pastors, and the like. Most people have seen fake and phony televangelists pretending to be Godly men while suckering people out of their money and engaging in illicit drugs and sex. These types of false prophets are easy to spot. But what about the less obvious ones? They wear the garment of God. They say they represent God, they say they speak God’s Word, but they are liars. Jesus gave us the tools to be able to discern who is a true Christian and who is not. He said:

¹⁵ “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every

tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (Matthew 7:15-20).

False preachers and leaders will not bear Godly fruit. What does Jesus mean by “bearing fruit”? He means the way people live, their words, their deeds, their lifestyle; especially when they think no one else is looking. A tree cannot hide its true identity. If a so-called preacher or pastor goes about his daily affairs and his actions are not such that lead others to Jesus, he or she is a false prophet. In fact, their actions often turn people away from the truth of the Gospel. What kind of fruit do they bear? The Apostle Paul explained:

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21).

Preachers and pastors who exhibit these characteristics, also called “lusts of the flesh”, are not living for Christ. They have not submitted themselves to Christ’s authority and they are not living holy. In fact, this holds true for all Christians, not just those in leadership positions. No matter how good his or her preaching and teaching may be, we are justified to suspect that someone is a false prophet if we see in him or her exhibiting the lusts of the flesh. The Apostle John said, “Don’t believe every spirit because there are many false prophets in the world. You have to test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” (1 John 4:1). When we test a spirit, we have to examine both his character and his message.

Jesus warned that every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. He is not talking about a tree that bears mostly good fruit but also a bad fruit on occasion. This happens to all trees from time to time. No one is perfect but Christ. Jesus was talking about a tree that **continually** bears bad fruit; it is deemed corrupt and is cut down. When it comes to spiritual leaders, God will look at their lives as a whole, the nature of their teaching, and how they impact those around them. False prophets who continually produce lusts of the flesh rather than Godly fruits will be destroyed.

False Christians

When Jesus said “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”, he was not just referring to corrupt leaders. He was talking about you and me as well. Jesus explained:

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ (Matthew 7:21-23).

In his Wiersbe Bible Commentary, Dr. Wiersbe explains this passage in detail, “Words are not a substitute for obedience, and neither are religious works. Preaching, casting out demons, and performing miracles can be divinely inspired, but they give no assurance of salvation. It is likely that even Judas participated in some or all of these activities, and yet he was not a true believer.” In other words, while discerning false prophets is important, it is even more important to keep in mind that it is also by your own fruits that you will be known. The same principle applies to all. A tree must bear good fruit or else it will be removed and destroyed. Claiming to be a Christian, indeed even doing good works, is not sufficient to save you. We need to be hearers and doers of the Word. (James 1: 22-25). It is the *doing* that will make us spiritually fruitful and mark us as true Christians. The world will know us by our fruit.

Conclusion

Simply professing Christianity gives no protection against the coming judgment for spiritual leaders or individuals. Unfortunately, there will be professed pastors, preachers and laypersons who will be rejected by Christ at the end. That is what Jesus meant when he said, “Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 7:21). Do not be deceived about where you stand in Jesus. It is time for us to be honest with ourselves, take a look at our life and see if we are measuring up to God’s Word. Choose Jesus today!

God bless!