

THE RED LETTER LECTURES

NOTES

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT Jesus' Teaching on False Prophets Matthew 7:15-23

I. False Prophets

WATCH OUT* for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. — Mt. 7:15

A. *Watch out . . .*

1. An Imperative Command.
2. Lit., "To hold the mind or ear toward someone; to pay attention."
3. Be on guard, be careful. See Mt. 10:17, 16:6.

B. *false prophets.*

1. We know that a prophet is one who speaks for God. But what is a false prophet? See *2 Ptr. 2:1-2*.
2. Jesus said that many will appear in the end times and believers will be susceptible to these false teachers. See *Mt. 24:11-12*
3. They will perform miraculous signs to deceive believers. See *Mt. 24:24-25*.

C. *sheep's clothing . . . ferocious wolves.*

1. They will appear to be like everyone else in the church on the outside. Inwardly is a different story.
2. You will not be able to tell by their appearance. But you will be able to tell by examining what they say, watching how they act and the results of their ministry.

Read Boice, pp. 253-63.

Mt. 10:17: Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.

Mt. 16:6: "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

2 Ptr. 2:1-2: But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

Mt. 24:11-12: . . . and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.

Mt. 24:24-25: For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time.

II. Determining A False Prophet

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. — Mt. 7:16-18

A. *By their fruit . . .*

1. Metaphorically meaning, of deeds, works, conduct, i.e., the way they live their lives. See *Mt. 3:8; 21:43*.
2. Also their doctrine. See *Jude 4*.
3. Use the revealing *fruit of the Spirit* as a measure. See *Gal. 5:22*.
4. For further reading, *Dt. 13:1-11; 18:20-22*.

B. *grapes from thornbushes . . . figs from thistles?*

1. Rhetorical questions. Obvious answer is "No."

C. *bad tree . . . good tree . . .*

1. A bad tree in this metaphor is characterized by always yielding bad fruit.
2. A good tree is characterized by always yielding good fruit.
3. The trees and the fruit of trees in this metaphor are not to be mixed.
4. Obviously there are times when bad fruit may come from a good tree but Jesus is talking about consistency, not absolute perfection. See *Jas. 3:1-2*.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. — Mt. 7:19-20

A. *cut down and thrown into the fire . . .*

NOTES

Mt. 3:8: Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

Mt. 21:43: Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

Jude 4: For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Gal. 5:22

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Jas. 3:1-2: Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

1. False prophets (bad trees) will attempt to deceive the elect. See *Mt. 24:10-11*.
2. There is little doubt as to the spiritual outcome of a false prophet. God will make the final judgment.

III. Specific Examples

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. — *Mt. 7:21*”

A. *Lord, Lord . . .*

1. *Kurie, Kurie*. This is the highest title or name given to Jesus in the Scripture. See *Psm. 110:1 (Mk. 12:36)*.
2. *Adonai* in Hebrew. To avoid the risk of taking God's name (YHWH) in vain, devout Jews began to substitute the word for the proper name itself.
3. Some believe this is the "Name" that is above all names. See *Phil. 2:9-11*.
4. Anyone can say certain words with ease but it doesn't mean anything to them. Christianese.
5. Prison example.
6. The one who claims the Lordship of Christ must by definition, live by that claim.

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 perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’
— *Mt. 7:22-23*

A. *prophesy . . . drive out demons . . . perform many miracles . . .*

1. Miraculous acts have always been performed by true disciples to this day. *Mk. 16:17-18; Jn. 14:12*.
2. In the last days false prophets will perform these signs to deceive the elect. See *Mk. 13:22-23*.

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Mt. 24:10-11: At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Psm. 110:1: The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

Phil. 2:9-11: Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Mk. 16:17-18: And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues;¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

Jn. 14:12: I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Mk. 13:22-23: For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

3. We are in the last days. See Heb. 1:1-2.
4. Contrary to some, those who perform miraculous signs and wonders today are not to be automatically labelled as false prophets.
5. Healings, miraculous signs and spiritual discernment, and prophecy are all gifts of the Spirit. See *1 Cor. 12:7-11*.
6. Our responsibility as Christians is to make sure it's the real thing by testing the spirits. See *1 Jn. 4:1-3*.
7. We also test by the obedience to God's Word and ongoing walk with Jesus. We should know God's Word so well, that we would recognize false teaching immediately. See *1 Jn. 2:4-6*.

B. *I never knew you . . . away from me, you evildoers.*

1. This is the final judgment of false prophets and teachers and all unbelievers. See *Rev. 22:14*.

IV. Imperative Commands in this section of study.

A. **WATCH OUT** for false prophets.

V. Questions for discussion:

1. Someone once said, "If you are going to place poison on a shelf where you have healing medicines, you had better label it clearly." Boice applied this to false teachers in the church (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Would you be able to recognize a false teacher? How?
2. Arthur Pink once declared, "Never were there so many millions of nominal Christians on earth as there are today, and never was there such a small percentage of real ones . . ." Respond.
3. What does it mean to call Jesus, "Lord"?
4. In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer defines "cheap grace." How does that fit with your relationship with the Lord? See Boice, p. 259.

NOTES

Heb. 1:1-2: In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

1 Cor. 12:7-11: Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Jn. 4:1-3: Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

1 Jn. 2:4-6: The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

Rev. 22:14: Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.