

**THE ETERNAL DANGER OF A FALSE PROFESSION****Matthew 7:15-23****MAT 2008-27**

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***"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7:15-23).***

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*Father, As we read these words this morning they are unsettling and sobering words. We ask that You help us today to be willing to examine our lives before You, to examine our profession and see whether or not the evidence of the saving work of the Spirit is present in our lives. Father, we pray for Your Church across the nation today, and across the world where, in many places, there are folks who populate the roles of our Churches who believe that they are on the narrow road, but they are really on the broad road. Father, we ask that you help us to, as Your Word instructed us in Philippians, examine ourselves to do all that we can to work out our salvation in fear, and trembling, because it is You Who works in us, both to will and to do according to Your good pleasure. Father, give us ears to hear this morning. We pray that the Holy Spirit will be present here with us, moving in our hearts through the Word, convincing, convicting, and reproving, and instructing us. Lord, You see all of us today. You see our hearts. You see the authenticity, or the in-authenticity of our lives today. We pray that You would bring that to the surface that we might see it as You see it. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

The closing words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, I think, are some of the most alarming words in the New Testament. We have noticed that Jesus has been calling His hearers to understand the application of this Sermon on the Mount. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has been instructing His listeners about REAL Christianity. He has been telling them in no uncertain terms, without any equivocation, what it really looks like to be a member of the Kingdom - what it really looks like to be a follower of Jesus Christ. In the final verses of this sermon, really beginning in verse 13 through the end of the chapter, Jesus has been driving home with clarity this issue of whether or not you are really in the Kingdom. Jesus has been asking them to look at their lives, and examine themselves in light of these truths.

Last week we saw that Jesus said there is only one road that leads to Heaven, and it's a narrow road, and there are few (relatively speaking) who are traveling that narrow road. So, you see that Jesus is really beginning to focus and to hone in His Sermon on the Mount onto the issue as to where we are personally in relationship to the Kingdom of God.

One of the most disconcerting things Jesus says in this closing appeal in the Sermon on the Mount is that there are many people who will, on the Day of Judgment, find themselves believing that they are real Christians, only to discover that they are not. People who find themselves leaning upon their Christian activities, or even their MINISTRIES who, in the Day of Judgment, will be told by the Lord, Himself "...depart from Me, because I don't KNOW you... (Matthew 7:23). That's a sobering thing isn't it? To think that a person could spend their life in the confines of a Church, to think that a person could spend their life in the atmosphere of Christian work only to discover on the Day of Judgment that their profession of faith in Jesus was an empty profession, void of any real content. Jesus says that there are going to be those who profess eternal life who do not possess eternal life. That's a sobering thing.

In this passage, I think Jesus exposes one of the great problems of the Twenty-First Century Church - the problem of unregenerate Church members. People whose names are in ink on the roles of a congregation somewhere, but whose names are not in the Lamb's Book of Life. They may be people who are resting upon an experience, perhaps. It may be an emotion experience. They may be people who are resting upon a formulated prayer that perhaps they prayed at some point in their life, only to find that there was not any reality behind that experience, or any reality behind those words. There are people across our country, today, whose names are on Church roles who are devoid of spiritual life.

Even in our own denomination, according to the most recent statistics there are 16,266,920 members reported by Southern Baptist Churches. But listen to this, "on any given Sunday, only 6,148,868 are accounted for in the primary worship services of their Church on a given week." That amounts to 62% of those that we are claiming as members of our Church who have no meaningful participation in the life of the congregation. That's terrible! There is something wrong when 62% of our people couldn't be found by the FBI on any given Sunday. They don't attend, they don't give, they don't serve, they don't participate, and yet they are counted as members of the Church.

Now, of course, Church membership is always going to be an inexact science because only God really knows anyone's heart. We hope that when a person gives a profession of faith in Jesus that it's a credible profession of faith, and we do what we can to find out whether that's a credible profession of faith; that people really understand the gospel when they join the Church. Only God really knows. There is always going to be a mixed multitude in every congregation of people who really are saved, and people who really aren't. But these statistics, I think, point out a very large problem in modern Evangelical Churches. I would venture to say that that's not a problem confined to the ranks of the Southern Baptists. I am sure that across the board in Evangelical Churches the same issue exists.

Why does this problem exist? Again, I think Jesus helps us by putting His finger on the real issue. According to Jesus Christ, a genuine faith includes not just a profession of trust in Jesus, but it is backed up by the evidence of a changed life. There is the demonstration of real life when there is real conversion. According to Jesus, conversion produces the fruit of a new life, and Jesus INSISTS that genuine Christianity produces change, and good fruit, just like a healthy tree produces good fruit.

D. A. Carson says this about this phenomenon, "*it is true, of course, that no man enters the Kingdom because of his obedience, but it is equally true that no man enters the Kingdom who is not obedient. It is true that men are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, but it is equally true that God's grace in a man's life inevitably results in obedience.*" He goes on to say that, "*any other view of grace cheapens grace, and turns it into something unrecognizable. Cheap grace preaches forgiveness without repentance, Church membership without rigorous Church discipline, discipleship without obedience, blessing without persecution, joy without righteousness, results without obedience.*" Here's how he concludes, "*in the entire history of the Church, has*

*there ever been another generation with so many nominal Christians and so few REAL ones?"* That's a tough statement.

I think it's critical that we heed the words of Jesus in these verses, and that we take a close look at the warning that Jesus is giving us here. THIS IS A WARNING to every one of us. It's a warning to me, it's a warning to you, to examine the authenticity of your profession of faith.

Now, I am not here today to cast doubt or aspersion in anyone's heart. But, how can we escape the issue that is at stake here in the words of Jesus? Who among us, here today, would want to be one of those persons who finds themselves standing before the bar of judgment, standing before Jesus Christ, and to have Jesus look you in the eye and say to you, **"...I never knew you; depart from Me..." (Matthew 7:23)**. Can you imagine? Can you IMAGINE what it would be like to be resting in a false assurance all your life only to discover that you weren't really a Christian? That's what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus is calling every one of us. And this is not isolated to Jesus' words. Throughout the Epistles we find statements over and over that are encouraging us to examine ourselves, and to ask ourselves whether our faith is genuine. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, there is everything RIGHT about that, because much of the New Testament was written to say to people, 'if you say this, but you do this, you need to find out why there is a spiritual disconnect between your profession, and your behavior.' That's exactly what Jesus is talking about in this passage.

Jesus deals with two different groups of people in this passage. He deals with false prophets, and He deals with false professors. So, let's notice how Jesus unwinds this issue for us today. He begins in verse 15 by saying that we are to recognize false prophets by the fruit of their lives. **"Beware"**, He says, **"of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15)**. 'Beware' is a word that means to be in a constant state of readiness, to be in a constant state of observation. It means to be aware, and anxious, and know what's going on around you. It means to be on the lookout, it means to be on guard. Again, it's a word of warning. Jesus says, "watch out, beware of the false prophets."

Now, this warning is echoed again by others in the New Testament, and isn't it amazing that within the first generation of the Church we find the apostles saying to the Church 'there are going to be false prophets among you'? I mean, this is not generations removed. This is even prior to Pentecost. After Pentecost, there in the Book of Acts in Chapter 20, we find Paul saying to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, **"when I leave, I KNOW"**, he says, **"that there will be false prophets who come in among you not sparing the sheep" (Acts 20:29)**. Jesus says, "beware of false prophets."

In 2 Peter 2:1 Peter warned of false teachers. John says, **"Beloved, test every spirit to see whether that spirit is of God, because there are MANY false prophets who have gone out into the world" (1 John 1:1)**. Jesus is simply giving a basis for what we find in the rest of the New Testament, that we need to be aware of false prophets - why? Because false prophets look one way on the outside, but on the inside they are something completely different. Jesus says that false prophets look good on the outside, but on the inside there is danger. He says, "they come in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15). They LOOK good. They SOUND good. Their message is smooth. Their appearance is smooth. Their words are convincing and persuasive. They look to all the world like real leaders in the Church; like people who can be trusted. But Jesus says inside, **"they are ravenous wolves."** In other words, there are going to be people within the Church who will rise up within the Church, false prophets within the Church, Jesus says, that we need to be aware of who look good, but really prey on the sheep. Jesus says that we need to be aware of that.

Now, what do they do? We learn, as we read through the rest of the New Testament, that there are different things that they do in terms of preying on the sheep, and different motivations. Sometimes it's for their own pride and reputation that false prophets prey on the Church. Sometimes it's for money, like Balaam in the Old Testament who preyed upon the people of God for his own personal gain. Sometimes, it's even for things like sexual sin that false prophets creep their way into the Church.

So as we read through the New Testament, we discover that there are many motivations, and many things that the false prophets do to take advantage of the Church, but Jesus says, "**the only way you can really know them is to observe their fruit.**" Now, may I say to you this morning that not everything you hear on Christian TV is really Christian? Can I say to you, today, that not everything you buy in the Christian Book Store is really Christian? It sounds good, it's well packaged; I mean after all, the guy is packing out a huge hall – surely he must be right? Jesus says that's not the way to decide whether someone is genuine or not. It's not by how many book contracts they have, or the size of their audience, or how many people are following them. The only way to really discover them is to look at the fruit of their lives. Jesus says the outward fruit of their life is the evidence of the true inward character. Appearances can be deceiving, but fruit never lies. Jesus says to look at the fruit.

Now, what kind of fruit? Well, I think there are three different areas, or categories, that we might think about in terms of inspecting the fruit of a false teacher.

The first one would be their teaching. Turn over to Matthew 12:33 for just a moment. Listen to what Jesus says, "**Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart**" (Matthew 12:33-34). Now that's not a politically correct way to address your audience is it? "**You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil...**" Jesus is talking about WORDS here. "**You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned**" (Matthew 12:34-37).

The first way you can determine whether or not a prophet is real or false is by listening to what they say, and comparing it to the truth of God's Word. Do you know why so many false prophets so easily creep into the Church today? Because there is a FAMINE of the knowledge of God's Word. You cannot determine the counterfeit unless you know the real. So, one fruit that we can inspect in the lives of a supposed prophet is what they SAY; what they teach. If they teach that which is contrary to the word of God, then we know that it can't be right. No matter how many books they write, no matter how many auditoriums they pack out.

A second area, I think, is the area of lifestyle. Turn to 2 Peter 2 for just a moment. Look at verses 18 & 19. Peter, in speaking about the false teachers says this, "**For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved**" (2 Peter 2:18-19). Peter is saying, 'look at the lifestyles of the false prophets, and ask yourself this question. Is it a lifestyle of holiness, or is it a lifestyle of corruption? Is it a lifestyle of impurity? Because, Jesus says that whatever you follow you have been enslaved by that. That's your master.' So, watch the lifestyle of the teacher, and you will know by that fruit whether or not the teacher is true or false.

I think a third line of evidence is the followers of the teacher. Look at 2 Timothy 4. We listen to what they say, and we compare it to Scripture. We look at the lifestyle and ask ourselves, is it pure or is it corrupt? Then we look at what they attract, and the followers that they've attracted to themselves. ***"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."*** Why? ***"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths."*** (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

When you find a collection of people who are turning to myths, their leader is likely to be a false teacher and not a true teacher, because you look at what the false teacher has attracted to himself. If they are ungodly and corrupt and unorthodox, their followers will be ungodly and corrupt and unorthodox, mostly. Now, there may be exceptions to that, but primarily you will see that phenomenon. So, think about the teaching, the lifestyle, and the followers. Jesus says, "inspect the fruit."

Now, notice the warning that Jesus gives. He says, ***"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 7:18-19).*** This is a warning of judgment. Everywhere you read in the New Testament about the outcome of false teachers, what do you find? Eternal, everlasting judgment. That's what Jesus is saying. They will be cut down, and they will be thrown into hell! Because they are false teachers, they will be thrown into the fire - that is the final outcome of the false teacher.

Thomas Linacre was the King's physician to Henry VII and VIII. He was the founder of the Royal College of Physicians. He was a friend of some great Renaissance thinkers. Late in his life, he took Catholic orders, and he was given, for the first time, a copy of the gospel to read. You see, back in that time, there weren't copies of the Bible floating around – there were very few. So now that he was entering into his ministry orders with the Church he had a copy of the gospels. He read through the gospels. This was during one of the darkest hours of the Church, during the Papacy of Alexander VI - the Pope whose bribery, corruption, incest, and murder plumbed the depths of the annals of Church history and Christian shame. Linacre read the gospels, and here was his response. ***"Either these are not the gospels, or WE are not Christians."*** In other words, as he looked at the Church around him, and the leadership of the Church, and the people of his day, he said, 'either this isn't the truth, or we're not living up to the truth.' He was inspecting the fruit of his day. That is what Jesus is telling us to do. LOOK AT THE FRUIT. Don't be fooled by the smooth appearance, or the fiery zeal of the false prophets. Don't let the FACAD of his or her life trick you. Look for the markers of genuine godliness - what they say, how they live, and who they gather around them. The fruit will inevitably reveal the truth about the person. So, Jesus says, 'recognize false prophets by the fruit of their lives.'

Jesus says, ***"So then, you will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:20).*** Jesus continues in verse 21, ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."*** (Matthew 7:21). In other words, 'not everybody who calls on My name and says, Lord, Lord, or uses My name with respect will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' Not everyone who throws around Christian jargon are really Christians. Not every who says that they have allegiance to Jesus really has allegiance to Jesus. These people used the primary New Testament term in talking about Christ – the word Lord (kurios). It is the word that is often used in the New Testament to talk about the majesty and the dignity, and the glory, and even the deity of Jesus Christ. They were using that word. Jesus said, 'just because you used that word doesn't mean you're really going to Heaven.' There are going to be those who say, 'Lord, Lord', who don't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus says basically this, 'it's not the sayers but it's the doers who give evidence that they are really true believers.'

Jesus said in Luke 6:46, **"And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). "...If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine" (John 8:31).** Jesus said, **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who..."** what? **"...does the will of My Father who is in heaven. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" (Matthew 7:21-22).**

"Many" He says. Let that word grip your heart this morning. **"MANY will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your Name perform MANY miracles?" (Matthew 7:22).** That's pretty amazing stuff. Prophesying in the name of Jesus. Casting out demons in the name of Jesus. These are spiritually charged things. These are powerful displays – to prophesy and to cast out demons, and in Your Name perform many miracles.

How many people are there today in Christian society who think that everybody who does a miracle must be a man of God? Jesus says there are going to be many people who are LEANING upon these Christian activities, and activities that in the First Century of the Church did indeed characterize the Church and the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Those are the kinds of things we see in the First Century aren't they? Prophecies, and exorcisms, and miracles that authenticated the message of the apostles. Jesus says that there are going to be those who stand before Him on the Day of Judgment and say to Him, 'Lord, what do You mean we can't come in? We preached great sermons in Your name. Don't you remember when we cast out those demons in Your name? Don't you remember the healings and the miracles that we performed, Jesus, in your name? Surely there's got to be a mistake. Check the Book AGAIN, Lord!' Jesus is going to look at them and say, **'Depart from me, I NEVER KNEW YOU. Depart from me you who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 7:23).**

Now, make the connection between knowing Jesus and PRACTICING Jesus. Jesus says, 'I don't know you, you are practitioners of lawlessness.' There are a lot of people today who want to use the language of knowing Jesus - 'well, I know Jesus.' Then why aren't you living for Him? 'It doesn't matter – all I gotta do is know Jesus, right? All I have to do is know Jesus, then I can be assured I'm going to Heaven, right?'

Jesus says, 'I didn't know you, and the evidence of that is that you are not practicing the kind of lifestyle that characterizes the people that I know.' You see, the relationship with Jesus is more than just words, folks. It's more than a profession. It's more than just SAYING 'I know Jesus.' Jesus says, 'it's not those who say, but those who PRACTICE the will of My Father.'

Jesus is not saying it's wrong to give a profession of faith - in fact there's everything right about it. Isn't that what believers baptism is, essentially? It's a profession of your faith in Jesus Christ in a public way. Of course! There's nothing wrong with that. What Jesus is saying is this, 'don't LEAN on a paragraph, don't LEAN on a signed card, don't LEAN on an experience. If there's no LIVING to back up the authenticity of that profession, then it's not worth leaning on.' Jesus says, 'examine your life.' Knowing Christ, according to Jesus, produces a life of obedience. Not perfect obedience, but obedience. "False professors," Jesus says, are cast into hell. **"Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."**

John MacArthur quotes from an engraving that was found on a Church in Germany. Listen to this: **"Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us, 'you call Me Master, and obey Me not. You call Me light, and see Me not. You call Me the Way, and walk Me not. You call Me the life, and live Me not. You call Me wise, and follow Me not. You call Me fair, and love Me not. You call Me rich, and ask Me not. You call Me eternal and seek Me not. If I condemn thee, blame Me not."**

Jesus is saying that a profession of faith that is genuine is one that is demonstrated by evidence -the evidence of a changed life. Now, don't make a mistake about what Jesus is saying here. This is not Jesus teaching works salvation. It's not that. Jesus is not saying, 'listen, you know, God's going to weigh your good deeds and your bad deeds on the scale when you get to Heaven, and if the good deeds outweigh the bad, you're in!' That's NOT what Jesus is saying. NOWHERE does Jesus ever teach works righteousness. But, He does teach that real righteousness produces works! He does teach that a GENUINE, SAVING WORK OF GOD in the human heart is GOING TO BRING CHANGE! Not perfect change, but change.

Now, there are two things that I think all of us need to do in response to what Jesus says here today. First, examine whether you have truly repented of your sins, and trusted in Jesus Christ alone to save you. Has there been a point in your life – you may not know the exact day, and hour – that's not what I'm talking about; you may have not written in the fly leaf of your Bible, but has there been a point in your life when you realized you were a sinner, and you turned from your sins, and your hopelessness, and your lostness to Jesus Christ, and you said to Jesus, 'Jesus – YOU died on the cross for me, YOU rose from the dead, and I ENTRUST my life to you today'? Has there been a time in your life when you were converted?

If you answer that question yes, then I ask you another question. Examine your life today, and ask yourself whether there is the evidence of a real saving work of God in your life NOW. Listen, I believe that the Bible teaches us to talk about assurance, not in terms of what I said, or what happened to me THEN, but what's going on now. What's happening in my life today? Is there a love for Jesus Christ in my heart – imperfect as it may be? Is there a desire in my heart to please Him in the way I live my life? Do I love the people of God? Do I love the Word of God? Am I grieved by my sin? Is there, within me, a desire to turn from sin when I find it in my life? Is there, within me, a passion for the things of God? Those are the signs of life that the New Testament talks about over and over again in books like I John. John will say, *'if anyone will say, 'I love God, but he hates his brother, something's WRONG.'* Do you see what John is doing? He's saying, 'is there any evidence to back up those words? Is there any evidence of change in your life?'

You and God have to deal with that question - you alone before God. All I can see in any person's life here today is one little snapshot, one little sliver of your life, and no one can judge your life by one little sliver. You know in your own heart whether you really love Jesus Christ. You know in your own heart whether you really love His Word, and whether you really love His people, and whether there is a real desire to follow Him in your life. You know that.

Jesus is calling us today, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. All those Beatitudes – aren't they wonderful? Yes, they're wonderful, but are you living them? That's what Jesus is asking. Examine the evidence, and ask yourself, 'is my profession of faith REAL?'

Don't trust in a false profession. Don't be one of those people who'll stand before Christ only to hear Him say, 'I know you said you knew me, but I don't know you.'

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