

Sermon on the Mount

Lesson #22

“Kingdom Responsibilities”

Beware of Falseness VI

Matthew 7:15-23

Scripture: Matthew 5:20 *“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Introduction:

I really like watching the history and discovery channels. The other day I was watching a program on the Jonestown massacre.

Jonestown was the informal name for the **Peoples Temple Agricultural Project**, an [intentional community](#) in northwestern [Guyana](#) formed by the [Peoples Temple](#), an [American cult](#) led by [Jim Jones](#). It became internationally notorious when, on November 18, 1978, 918 people died in the settlement as well as in a nearby airstrip and in [Georgetown](#), Guyana's capital. The name of the settlement became synonymous with the incidents at those locations.

A total of 909 Temple members died in Jonestown, all but two from apparent [cyanide](#) poisoning, in an event termed "revolutionary suicide" by Jones and some members on an audio tape of the event and in prior discussions. The poisonings in Jonestown followed the murder of five others by Temple members at a nearby Port Kaituma airstrip. The victims included [Congressman Leo Ryan](#), the first and only Congressman [assassinated](#) in the line of duty in the history of the United States. Four other Temple members died in Georgetown at Jones' command.

As I watched this tragic event it dawned on me how influential people can become. If a person is a good person, great and wonderful things can be accomplished by such influence, but when the person is a dirty rotten scoundrel...an atrocity like this can happen.

Transitional Statement:

Church, plainly put today Jesus is going to tell us to be on guard for people that present lies as the truth.

John 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

I. Beware of False Prophets

Matthew 7:15

15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

- A. First of all a prophet was a person chosen by God to speak for Him.
 1. From the time of Israel until the written word, God spoke to mankind through prophets
 - a. 2 Peter 1:21 talking about the prophets says that they were “...*men moved by the Holy Spirit (to speak) from God.*”
 - b. So in that group of men were familiar names like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others
 - 1) Men of God who from our point in history we hold with dear affection and respect in our hearts.
 2. But Israel didn't always think so kindly of them.
 - a. On a regular basis Israel seemed to turn away from what God had in mind for them.
 - b. Jesus says in Matthew 5:12.... They (Israel) persecuted the prophets
 - 1) I think about Jeremiah being cast down into an old cistern because he wouldn't tell Israel what she wanted to hear.
Jer 38:6
 - 2) King Ahab and his wife Jezebel tried with all vigor to have Elijah killed.
 - b. You see, Israel only seemed to respect the prophets when they were getting their way.
 - 1) And a quick read through of both the major and minor prophets reveals that Israel ended up in Babylonian captivity because they would listen to these men of God.
 - 2) **But specifically folks took note of the respect and honor that was present when the prophets were saying what they wanted to hear.**
 3. Which leads us to the mention of False Prophets here by Jesus.
 - a. A false prophet defined in the Greek is a pretended foreteller or religious imposter.

- b. Nelson's Bible Dictionary defines them as those who falsely claim to utter revelation or instruction from God.
- c. Interestingly enough a recurring characteristic of a false prophet is that they are generally employed by the powerful to speak pleasing, flattering words to their employers.
- d. Jeremiah condemned the false prophets of his day by saying in Jer 6:14

14 "They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace, But there is no peace'"

- e. The prophets of Jeremiah's day preached popular but false messages: victory against Babylon. Jer 28:1-17

4. I can't imagine such a thing, can you? But this was said of God's people in New Testament times

- a. 2 Timothy 4:3 says:

3 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.

- b. Jeremiah said of Israel "the prophets prophesy falsely and my people love to have it so ...Jer 5:31
- c. And obviously this can be a temptation for us considering Jesus caution here.

5. In the Beatitudes recorded in Luke chapter 6 Jesus points out a clear initial bench mark of false teaching or prophecy.

- a. He says in Luke 6:26

26 "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way."

- b. You see when you speak the truths of God's word ...not everyone will agree with it.

1) But can you see the trap. For the most part we don't want tension. We want agreement and kind smiles ... etc.

2) But godliness is not always popular.

B. Here Jesus says that they come in sheep's clothing

- 1. What happened to come as you are?

- a. They disguise themselves behind sheep's clothing simply because they have ulterior motives.
 - 1) They don't want to change themselves, but want to blend in and change you to fit their fancy.

- b. Hiding behind a godly appearance they only have their own desires in mind.

2. They have full understanding of who they are and their motives.

- a. But they hide themselves behind a godly appearance.

- b. They are masters of disguise

- a. Constantly manipulating their appearance and position for their own gain.

C. Jesus says that inwardly they are ravenous wolves

1. "Ravenous" is the Greek word "harpax" which means rapacious

- a. given to seizing for plunder or satisfaction of greed.

- b. Inordinately greedy or predatory

- b. If you think of a wolf...you might think of them as only concerned with what they want...with absolutely no thought of others in mind at all.

2. Now, let me ask you if any certain group of people in Jesus' sermon fit this description? Yes the Scribes and Pharisees.

D. To this end Jesus says: "Beware" of them...

- 1. Beware means to hold your mind toward... i.e. pay attention or be cautious about.

II. Then Jesus goes on to explain how you can identify a false prophet

Matthew 7:16-20

16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 " Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

- A. In high school I did a leaf collection for some class. I went all over creation trying to get these crazy leaves.

1. I had a choice of assignments and picturing a five minute walk through a forest to gather my leaves, I went for what I thought was easy.
 2. But it wasn't easy because I didn't know what the trees were.
 - a. I had to go get leaves from peoples yards where they could tell me what the trees were for sure, which took a lot of time and effort.
 - b. But there were a few trees that I knew for sure by myself what they were.
 - 1) Trees that had peaches hanging on them....were peach trees.
 - 2) If they had apples I knew they were apple trees
 - 3) If they had pears...they were a pear tree
 - 4) If they had pecans....they were a pecan tree.
 - * You get the idea a tree is, without doubt, identified by its fruit.
 3. You see the fruit is the result of the inward makeup of a tree.
- B. And we understand here that Jesus isn't talking about trees...He is talking about people.
1. His point is that no matter how a person presents themselves outwardly, all people can be identified by the fruit that their lives produce.
 2. i.e. if a sheep growls and barks like a dog.....this would be a clue.
 - a. If a person talks godlinessbut lives in sin....another clue
 - b. And if a Christians promotes self righteousness....still another clue
- B. With this in mind, Jesus says that *" Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."*
1. Simply put there is no use for a tree that produces bad fruit.
 2. Jesus says that they will be cut down and thrown into the fire.
 - a. And you don't want to be in any proximity to them

III. Not everyone that proclaims to be godly ...is godly.

Matthew 7:21-23

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 will enter. 22 " 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?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

A. Godliness is not a matter of self proclamation....but simply is a matter of doing the will of God.

1. Yes our ticket into heaven is focus on the will of God....not on man's will.

B. Then the terrifying truth that many, who have thought that they are godly, on that great and final day will be turned away.

1. Can you imagine being all comfortable with your relationship with God and hear Him say...depart from Me I never knew you?

2. Jesus says it will happen...to many.

a. At that moment I picture in my mind the great flood. People crying for help and being sweep away into destruction.

Conclusion:

2 Peter 2:1-3

1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

John 8:31-32

"So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, " If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."